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Asserting Republican Manhood and Bringing the Bashaw To Reason:
The Evolution and Defense of Republican Ideology during America's Tripolitan War,
1801-1805

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

History

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To my grandfather, John Richard Shearwood, Jr.,

For ensuring that thoughts of salty air and the sound of waves on the hull would always inspire both my passion and my imagination.

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Preface

As studies of the Barbary states can provide great insight into Jeffersonian-era American identity and questions and problems faced by early American policy-makers, the disconnect between existing studies of republican ideology and that of America's relations with Barbary represent a significant gap in recent scholarship. The majority of works regarding American relations with the Barbary states have focused instead on the military aspect of that relationship, especially America's war against Tripoli from 1801-1805, or have used these events to expand upon narratives detailing the development of the United States Navy. The two largest subcategories of literature discussing military relations with Barbary came about as a result of other military efforts in which America was involved, namely Operation Torch, the November 1942 invasion of North Africa during the Second World War, and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Works such as journalist Joseph Wheelan's *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801-1805* (New York, 2003) and historians Wright and Macleod's *The First Americans in North Africa: William Eaton's Struggle for a Vigorous Policy Against the Barbary Pirates, 1799-1805* (Princeton, 1945) illustrate the most significant problem in studies of this nature: the attempt to make anachronistic connections to America's war with Tripoli in an effort to further a contemporary political agenda. In these instances, Wright and Macleod compare the weak policies of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson to the appeasement of Hitler and bring to light a common "World War II disenchantment

with appeasement policies.”¹ For his part, Wheelan seeks to further justify hostile action against “terrorist” states by attempting to develop a precedent for America’s reaction to the attacks by, what he attempts to classify as, religious extremists. These studies often ignore the economic and political factors involved in this conflict.

The most recent trend in scholarship involving the Barbary Wars has been to include the war with Tripoli briefly in a broad discussion of the development of the American Navy. In the majority of these cases the American Revolution and the War of 1812 are the cornerstones, while the Quasi-War with France and the First Barbary War are relegated to the position of nothing more than small episodes in the much larger narrative. Works of this nature include writer Ian Toll’s *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York, 2006) and historian George C. Daughan’s *If by Sea: The Forging of the American Navy From the Revolution to the War of 1812* (New York, 2008).

The most significant recent studies of American-Barbary relations have been those which focused solely on the Barbary Wars, the events leading up to them, and relations between America and the Muslim world. Most notable among these are Robert Allison’s *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (Chicago, 1995) and Frank Lambert’s *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York, 2005). Allison’s work focuses more on socio-cultural relations, while Lambert analyzes the economic and political climate that led America to war. Both of these historians’ works prove to be more straightforward studies with less

¹ Paul J. Zingg, “The United States and North Africa: An Historiographical Wasteland,” *African Studies Review* 16, no. 1 (April 1973), 108.

bias, as a result of their much less of an obvious political agendas and lack of overt attempts to build up America's naval tradition.

In much the same way as studies of the Barbary Wars have glossed over the impact of republican ideology, works discussing republicanism rarely analyze the Barbary Wars. Most historians generally choose to focus their discussions of foreign policy on French and Spanish relations regarding the Louisiana Purchase and the Napoleonic Wars. Likewise, they use slavery, and to a lesser extent relations with Native Americans, to analyze the place which race relations hold within a society built on this republican ideology. Both Drew McCoy's *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980) and Robert C. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson's *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1990) follow this trend. Their discussions of the motivations and ideals of the Founding Fathers, while insightful and easily applied to America's interactions with the Barbary states, rarely make the leap to include them. It is my hope that his work will serve to fill some of the void left by these notable scholars.

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the connection between republican ideology and America's experience during the Tripolitan War, 1801-1805. Special focus is paid to the connection between early American republicanism and America's perceptions of the Barbary states, with specific analysis of racial, religious, and social issues which influenced American policy at the time. To accomplish this, Chapter One provides an overview of early perceptions of the Barbary pirates by the United States, in order to better establish the pirates as a barbarous and uncivilized "other" in the eyes of Americans. Chapter Two, then, begins with a brief description of the experience of being imprisoned by corsairs, before moving to a discussion of the ideological debate between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. This chapter elaborates on their views on the most effective method for dealing with the Barbary states and their definitions of republicanism, both being arguments which are indicative of their wider political beliefs. Chapter Three consists of an analysis of captivity narratives to illustrate the captives' views on republicanism. This chapter also discusses the response of Americans at home to these seizures. Finally, Chapter Four is a case study of Stephen Decatur, Jr., as the pinnacle of republican manhood at the time. This examination brings together aspects of republicanism and Jeffersonianism, discussed throughout this work, in order to present Decatur as a culmination of this ideal. Thus, this thesis demonstrates that, despite being glossed over by many historians of the period, the Tripolitan War helps to clearly define

republican ideology in the opening years of the nineteenth century, while also demonstrating that those ideas remained constantly in flux.

Chapter One

Barbarian Cruelty: America's Early Perceptions of North Africa, 1690-1785

On the afternoon of February 16, 1804, the American vessel *Intrepid*, formerly the Tripolitan ketch¹ *Mastico*, sat anchored just over the horizon from Tripoli's harbor. American naval Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, Jr., had captured the *Mastico* on December 23, 1803, and Commodore Edward Preble had ordered it renamed *Intrepid*. Now, Decatur, along with a group of five midshipmen and seventy volunteer sailors, were waiting onboard for a favorable wind and an opportunity to strike.² At seven o'clock that evening Decatur sailed into Tripoli's harbor. The *Intrepid*'s sails were rigged to resemble a Tripolitan vessel and only a few sailors remained on deck all "barelegged and wearing Turkish jackets" in an attempt to attract as little attention as possible from the shore.³ Their destination, "moored within half Gun shot of the Bashaw's Castle, and of their principal Battery,"⁴ was the American frigate *Philadelphia*, formerly under the command of William Bainbridge. Along with his crew, Bainbridge had been held prisoner by the Tripolitan ruler, or bashaw, since the *Philadelphia* ran aground within five miles of

¹ A ketch is a small, lightly armed vessel with two masts commonly used by pirates sailing from African ports in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

² Edward Preble to Stephen Decatur, U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, Syracuse Harbor, January 31, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, ed. Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S. Navy (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 3:376.

³ Fletcher Pratt, *Preble's Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power* (1950; repr., Cranbury, NJ: The Scholar's Bookshelf, 2007), 95.

⁴ Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, Ketch *Intrepid*, at Sea, February 17, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:414. The Bashaw, a rank within the Ottoman Empire akin to governor or lord was the ruler of Tripoli. As the grammar and spelling within much of the correspondence of this time was overly creative, no attempts will be made to correct the grammar or spelling of the original writers. As these instances are so numerous *sic* will also not be used to denote misspellings, as its many occurrences would prove distracting to the reader.

Tripoli's harbor and was captured by Tripolitan pirates on October 31 of the previous year. It was Bainbridge's former vessel which Decatur and the rest of the *Intrepid's* crew were targeting. Their mission was to destroy the *Philadelphia* before the Tripolitan pirates could refit her and use her against the American squadron.

Made up of Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis and stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to Egypt's western border, Africa's Barbary Coast covers the majority of the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. For much of the mid-sixteenth century the majority of that territory, with the exception of the independent kingdom of Morocco, was under the direct control of the Ottoman Empire; however, after their defeat at Lepanto in 1571 the Ottomans could no longer effectively defend themselves and support the Barbary states. As such, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli lost much of the economic and military protection that the Ottomans had provided for almost half of a century.

As a result of the decline in Ottoman involvement, harsh climate, and lack of resources along Africa's northern coast, these states needed a way to support themselves. To accomplish this, they turned with enthusiasm to piracy, preying on Christian shipping out of Europe. As piracy increased, it became an integral part of both the societies and economies of the Barbary states. This practice included looting European vessels and enslaving and ransoming their crews. Many of the captured vessels were incorporated into the pirate fleets, either used in whole or for materials. European nations avoided such treatment by signing treaties in which they agreed to pay for protection from each state's fleet of pirates and safe passage through the waters which the pirates patrolled. Depending on the conditions of each individual treaty, the protection money, referred to

more commonly as a “tribute,” was paid in either cash, materiel, or a combination of the two.

As the Barbary corsairs became a greater threat, several European nations launched military actions against them. Just as the rough, dry landscape of northern Africa precipitated the shift to a pirate economy, it also provided the pirates with a vast number of easily defensible harbors in which they established many well fortified ports. This geographic advantage, coupled with the fact that the well-trained and battle-hardened pirate crews rarely attacked anything more than lightly armed merchant ships, generally avoiding military vessels, meant that the nations of Europe were unable to strike any significant military blow against the pirates. This trend continued until a joint Anglo-Dutch fleet under Admiral Robert Blake was able to attack and defeat Algiers, the most powerful of the Barbary states, in 1682. This victory allowed the English to negotiate peace treaties with the rest of the Barbary states.⁵ Despite the damage done to the Algerine fleet by Blake’s forces, however, the pirates remained a threat to those nations who had been unable to force such a treaty.

Prior to the American Revolution, Britain's American colonies were granted protection from Barbary piracy under the 1682 Treaty of Peace and Commerce. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, however, the young nation found itself at the mercy of the same threat which had plagued Europe for centuries. In the summer of 1785, Barbary pirates began seizing American merchant vessels off Africa’s Mediterranean and northern Atlantic coasts. Under the Articles of Confederation, the

⁵ Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 34.

United States government was unable to raise funds to pay ransoms or tributes, and thus the young nation was forced to endure the seizure of its ships and the consequences which this entailed—the enslavement of American citizens and a rising cost of living in seaport cities as a result of skyrocketing insurance rates.⁶

Once the Constitution was ratified, however, the United States government was in a better position to defend itself against piracy and other external threats. With the ability to tax and the passage of the Naval Act of 1794, congress found itself in a position to construct a small naval force, originally consisting of only six frigates to protect American shipping at home and abroad. The *Philadelphia* was one of those six frigates.

Compared to most Barbary vessels, the *Philadelphia* was a relatively large and well-armed ship and would have made a significant addition to the Tripolitan fleet. As such, the Bashaw of Tripoli had ordered it towed from its perch on the rocks and repaired. As the Americans were already outnumbered in the Mediterranean, such a prized vessel could not be allowed to fall into the hands of the pirates. Commodore Edward Preble, understanding that “the destruction of the *Philadelphia* is an object of great importance,” ordered Decatur to “proceed to Tripoly in company with the *Syren* Lt. Stewart, Enter that Harbor in the night Board the Frigate *Philadelphia*, burn her and make your retreat good with the *Intrepid*.”⁷

With the *Intrepid* disguised, Decatur and his men were able to easily board the *Philadelphia* and begin setting explosives throughout the ship; however, Preble’s warning

⁶ *Boston Gazette* quoted in Gary E. Wilson, “American Hostages in Moslem Nations, 1784-1796: The Public Response,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 134. Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 53.

⁷ Edward Preble to Stephen Decatur, U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, Syracuse Harbor, January 31, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:376.

that, “On boarding the Frigate it is probable you will meet with Resistance” and his advice that, “it will be well in order to prevent alarm to carry all by the Sword,” proved timely.⁸ In the ensuing skirmish to take control of the *Philadelphia*, approximately twenty Tripolitans onboard the *Philadelphia* were killed while a large boatful was able to escape and many others jumped overboard in an attempt to swim ashore.

Since the *Philadelphia* was in such close proximity to the Bashaw’s palace, “the noise occasioned by boarding and contending for possession (altho’ no fire arms were used) gave a general alarm on shore.”⁹ Despite the lack of continued secrecy, over the course of the battle the Americans “had not a man killed in this affair, and but one slightly wounded” and although they were being fired upon from cannon’s mounted on the palace walls, the *Intrepid* suffered no more damage than a single cannon ball through a single sail.¹⁰

Though the United States had been at war with Tripoli since 1801, Decatur’s successful destruction of the *Philadelphia* in such close proximity to an overwhelming enemy force was the first in a series of successes that ultimately culminated in an American victory in 1805. With this victory came the assurance that American trade within the Mediterranean Sea would not be hindered by pirates sailing from Tripoli, and to many political leaders at the time, this agreement to safeguard American shipping was essential for the young republic’s development and prosperity.

⁸ Ibid., 377.

⁹ Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, Ketch *Intrepid*, at Sea, February 17, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:414.

¹⁰ Ibid.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, as the United States was developing, the idea of republicanism was undergoing a transformation as well. To historian Drew McCoy, “broadly defined, ‘republicanism’ or ‘republican ideology’ has come to refer to a peculiarly eighteenth century political culture in which the idea of republican government was part of a much larger configuration of beliefs about human behavior and the social process.”¹¹ During this time Americans’ idea of republicanism was shifting from classical republicanism, with its focus on freedom from uncivilized tyranny, to a more liberal view of republicanism, which stressed the importance of popular rule and sacrifice for the greater good. As a result of the transition from classical to liberal republicanism which was taking place during the opening years of the nineteenth century, republicanism during the Jeffersonian period drew from both schools of thought.

During the early years of Thomas Jefferson’s tenure as president, republicans were still fearful of the tyranny and oppression which led to the Revolutionary War. At the same time, they were beginning to stress the values intrinsic in the developing liberal ideology.¹² By extension, for Americans during this time being a “republican man” meant opposing tyranny and barbarism, taking an active role in the shaping of the nation, and exerting one’s God-given right to rule. America’s war with Tripoli, from 1801-1805, despite often being overlooked by historians, clearly illustrates the state of republicanism

¹¹ Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 8.

¹² For more information on the development of republican ideology, see Bernard Bailyn’s *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), Gordon Wood’s *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991); and Lance Banning’s *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

between the Revolutionary War and the full fledged democratic revolution of the early nineteenth century.

McCoy's discussion of republicanism includes three attributes necessary for an effective republic: a government without corruption, access to open land, and adequate markets.¹³ Working from this understanding, "an ideology of 'free trade' [was what] tied this utopian vision to the hope of achieving a burgeoning and invigorating intercourse with the rest of the world."¹⁴ Thus, the ability to trade with southern Europe without being hindered by pirates was vital in order to support and maintain an effective republic. It was for this reason that Thomas Jefferson believed America had no choice other than to go to war to defend American shipping from Barbary piracy in 1801.

In addition to developing the American economy, republicans also had to define and defend their idea of a republican man if American ideology was to continue existing. For Americans at the time, as with many cultures before and since, the way they defined themselves, in this case as republican men, was often defined as contrary to what they perceived as other, less enlightened groups, including Muslims.¹⁵ Therefore, it is essential to define how American republicans perceived Barbary piracy, and piracy more generally, if one is to understand how Americans perceived themselves. Such a definition is important for both the clarification of rhetoric and to help establish a sense of "the other" which existed in the minds of early Americans. This will, by extension, help to lay the foundations for a definition of American identity.

¹³ McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 186.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁵ In all instances in which any groups are referred to as "barbaric," "savage," or "tyrannical," etc., it should be assumed that this terminology is specific to how Americans at the time viewed these groups.

The most basic definition of piracy is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “The practice or crime of robbery and depredation on the sea or navigable rivers, etc., or by descent from the sea upon the coast, by persons not holding a commission from an established civilized state.”¹⁶ Working from such a definition, it is possible to say that, from the perspective of the Barbary states, Barbary “piracy” was not piracy at all. The pirates’ spoils were divided up according to established local customs, in which the leader of each of the Barbary states would receive a portion of the captured goods. This practice, then, can be seen as *de facto* recognition on the part of Barbary leaders of the acceptability of preying on Christian shipping, thus making it so that the actions of the Barbary “pirates” may be more accurately classified as those of privateers. As such, piracy is not the most accurate term, and it may be more appropriate to refer to the Barbary pirates as corsairs,

the name in the languages of the Mediterranean for a privateer; chiefly applied to the cruisers of Barbary, to whose attacks the ships and coasts of Christian countries were incessantly exposed. In English, often treated as identical with *pirate*, though the Saracen and Turkish corsairs were authorized and recognized by their own government as part of its settled policy towards Christendom.¹⁷

While “piracy” may not be the most accurate term for the actions carried out by the Barbary states, it will henceforth be used interchangeably with “corsair.” This study hinges on the American perception of Barbary piracy and their belief that the Barbary states were uncivilized, and as such, it was as pirates which Americans saw these people. Therefore, by classifying the Barbary corsairs as pirates, Christians were automatically

¹⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Piracy.” All definitions taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary* date to the early nineteenth century.

¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Corsair.”

referring to them in a negative light, which included such descriptions as “Hellish *Moors*” and “*African Monster*.”¹⁸

According to Robert Allison, “Americans who used the Muslim world as a reference point for their own society were not concerned with the historical truth or with an accurate description of Islam, but rather with this description’s political convenience.”¹⁹ It was for this reason which some Americans used their perception of “the Other” to establish a frame of reference on which they could base their own definition of themselves. This then raises the question: if Americans considered North African society to be “barbarous” and un-American, how did they define what it meant to be “American”?²⁰

In the late eighteenth century, the primary definitions of “barbarous” included “uncultured, uncivilized, unpolished; rude, rough, wild, savage...the usual opposite of *civilized*,” “savage in infliction of cruelty, cruelly harsh,” and “unpolished, without literary culture.”²¹ Furthermore, according to Kathleen M. Brown,

In English discussion of America [during the colonial period] three major features of difference distinguished “barbaric” cultures from English civility. The first distinction was land use. Herding and hunting economies, with their transient settlements and low population densities, contrasted sharply with English visions of shining cities, well-cultivated

¹⁸ Cotton Mather, “The Glory of Goodness. The Goodness of God, Celebrated; in Remarkable *Instances and Improvements* thereof: And more particularity in the REDEMPTION remarkably obtained for the English Captives, Which have been languishing under the Tragical, and the Terrible, and the most *Barbarous Cruelties* of BARBARY. The History of what the Goodness of God, has done for the Captives, lately out of Barbary” (Boston: T. Green, 1703) in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 66.

¹⁹ Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 59.

²⁰ Cotton Mather, “The Glory of Goodness,” in *White Slaves, African Masters*, 63.

²¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Barbarous.”

countrysides, and burgeoning populations...Religion was the second great divide. Barbaric peoples who had not yet received knowledge of the true god from Europe adhered to non-Christian beliefs and engaged in non-Christian forms of worship. A third feature of barbarism in English discourse was non-English (which the English conflated to mean non-Christian) gender ways, expressed through clothing, the division of labor, and sexual mores.²²

If shining cities and well-cultivated countrysides were indeed vital to a civilized society, then the barren landscape of the Barbary Coast which resulted in the need to carry out piracy as a method of acquiring resources would unequivocally be considered barbaric. As a nation founded in part by differing groups of devout Christians, the commitment to Christian beliefs within American society seems to go almost without saying. It is significant to note, however, that not only was one's adherence to Christianity a social norm, in Brown's paradigm, it would have been considered uncivilized to practice any other religion. As such, by using the term "barbarous" as a pejorative to describe the peoples and practices of the Barbary states, Americans were implicitly defining themselves and their way of life as possessing cultural refinement, a fair and measured approach to law and punishment, and a more enlightened system of political thought.

After accepting McCoy's understanding of the geo-political factors necessary for the survival of a republic and Brown's definition of civility, it becomes apparent that republican ideology played an undeniable and important role in America's perceptions and dealings with the Barbary Coast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Concurrently, the events leading up to, and including, the First Barbary War, prove to be among the most illustrative reflections of the key aspects of Jeffersonianism: the

²² Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 55.

importance of markets to the growth of the republic, the role of masculinity and freedom for republican men, a racially stratified society with white men at the top, and the continued presence of the American revolutionary spirit.

Understanding that this period in relations between the West and the Muslim world, specifically the Ottoman Empire and those states tied to it, and modern relations between western nations and “radical” Muslim groups are not continuous is essential in understanding early-America’s relations with the Barbary states. His well-researched and accessible narrative notwithstanding, one of the most significant contributions made by Frank Lambert’s *The Barbary Wars*, especially in light of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is his insistence that Barbary piracy is not, and should not be compared to terrorism or what modern readers consider “radical” or “fundamentalist” Islam. Lambert’s argues that, “The Barbary Wars were primarily about trade, not theology, and that rather than being holy wars, they were an extension of America’s War for Independence.”²³ While these wars were about free trade and the extension of republicanism for Americans, to the pirates they were about money. Lambert argues that, “to Europeans and Americans, the rovers were robbers on the high seas. But to Moroccans they were at worst privateers sailing under the king’s flag and at best commercial capitalists seeking profit in the highly competitive Atlantic.”²⁴

Just as the pirates’ motivations should not be looked at through a strictly religious lens, neither should the American response. It is more accurate to examine the American response to piracy, especially during the early republican period, as an affront to the

²³ Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 8.

²⁴ Ibid., 4.

revolutionary and Jeffersonian ideas of freedom, masculinity, and republicanism which were shaping the young nation. This fact, however, did not prevent Americans, both those being held as captives and those with captive audiences, from assuming, and spreading the assumption that it was religious differences which resulted in the continuation of Barbary piracy against Americans, and Christians more generally.

Throughout early American history, “The Muslim world was a remarkably useful rhetorical device that could be used by libertarians like Mathew Lyon and Thomas Paine and by conservatives like John Adams and Alexander Hamilton,” during the early years of the American republic.²⁵ Furthermore, as a result of the religious differences between America and North Africa, this rhetorical device was also useful a century earlier for colonial minister Cotton Mather. Some of the best known early eighteenth century references to American-Barbary relations are not found in the firsthand accounts of captives, but were instead written by Mather. Through *A Pastoral Letter to the English Captives in Africa*, written and published in 1698, and *The Glory of Goodness*, a sermon written in 1703, Mather helped to cement perceptions of the inhabitants of the Barbary states by placing them in stark opposition to American identity and ideology.

Cotton Mather’s influence at the turn of the eighteenth century, especially in New England, was in no small part due to the role which he played during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 and 1693, an event in which attacks were made on another “barbaric” group. Those practicing witchcraft would have contradicted the second and third of Kathleen Brown’s requirements for civility, in that, according to their accusers, they were

²⁵ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 59.

violating both Christian beliefs and accepted social and gender practices. The 1689 publication of *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions...a Narrative of the marvellous Trouble and Relief Experienced by a pious Family in Boston, very lately and sadly molested with Evil Spirits* granted Mather recognition as somewhat of an expert on witchcraft and possession at the time of the trials. As such, Mather's expertise, while at times controversial, was called upon during the Witch Trials, and Mather gained further prominence within Boston's Puritan community.

Cotton Mather's earlier writing in regards to the risks which Barbary captivity posed to the Christianity and civility of those captured, the *Pastoral Letter*, illustrates Allison's point in that this letter does not focus on the threat of piracy or even the "Anguish of Spirit, & Cruel Bondage" which accompanied imprisonment, but instead used the imagery of captivity and suffering to highlight the virtues of Christianity, the sin of abandoning one's faith, and, by extension, the civilized aspects of colonial American society.²⁶ Through his writings, Mather took advantage of the fact that, "With the popular image of Muhammad and the Muslim world firmly established in the public mind, it was enough to mention either one as a starting point for a political argument," or in his case a religious discourse.²⁷ By using vague language and examples when discussing the "horrors" being inflicted upon English captives in North Africa, Mather was able to play off of the popular perception of Muslims and, by extension, Islamic practices. By speaking to the fears of those reading his letter, which was addressed to captives in Africa

²⁶ Cotton Mather, "A Pastoral Letter to the English Captives in Africa" (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1698), 3.

²⁷ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 59.

but was published and released in New England, Mather was able to use those fears to amass further support for his Puritan Christian beliefs, the basis of his political power in colonial Massachusetts, particularly in a society that had been subject to wars with another “savage” group: the Native Americans.

The connections between Native Americans and the Barbary pirates were obvious to Cotton Mather. At approximately the same period of time that Native American captivity narratives began to appear, so too did those recounting the experiences of American captives along the Barbary Coast. Paul Baepler argues,

Their appearance at roughly the same time as Indian captivity narratives suggests that the two were mutually influential and that we should reconsider a long-held belief about American literature: that the Indian captivity narrative, often considered the first indigenous American genre, had, if not precedents, then at least influences as far away as Africa.²⁸

Thus, while an understanding of Native American captivity would have provided Mather with some insight into the experiences of a Barbary captive, he also benefited from a much more intimate knowledge of Barbary captivity through his connection to Joshua Gee, who's son he would go on to minister with at Boston's North Church.²⁹ Gee was the first American to compose a narrative of his captivity in Algiers, after being held by the Algerines for seven years.³⁰ While Gee was captured in 1680, his account was not published until 1943, and though many of his contemporaries may not have read his account, “we might also imagine however, that Gee spoke of his ‘firy trials’ informally”

²⁸ Paul Baepler, “The Barbary Captivity Narrative in Early America,” *Early American Literature* 30, no. 2 (1995), 95.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gee was by no means the first American to be captured by the Barbary corsairs, his was simply the earliest known published account.

especially to “a few influential people such as Sewall, the Mathers, and Gee’s own famous son.”³¹ As a result of this connection to Gee, Mather would have understood the ideological connection between captivity at the hands of Native Americans and African corsairs. Furthermore, Mather would have undoubtedly, been aware of the “cross-influence” of Native American captivity narratives and Barbary captivity narratives, as Mather’s father penned the introduction to Mary Rowlandson’s famous narrative of her time as a captive of King Philip’s supporters.³²

Written four years later, Mather’s *The Glory of Goodness* sermon, had a similar purpose to the *Pastoral Letter*, namely to extol on the “Goodness of God” in an attempt to rouse the faith of Mather’s congregation in the superiority of their religion and ideology, rather than truly discuss the physical horrors faced by captives. Despite these similarities Mather spent significantly more time discussing the specifics of the “Barbarian Cruelty,” which the Christian captives faced. He states, “A Great Number of Our Good Subjects peaceably following their Employments at Sea, have been taken by the Turkish Pirates of *Algiers*, *Salley*,³³ *Barbary*, and other places on the Coast of *Africa*, and now remain Slaves, in Cruel and Inhumane Bondage, without any *Dayes of Rest*, either on the *Turkish Sabbath* or Ours.”³⁴ Descriptions such as these provided Mather’s audience with a better understanding of the captives’ experiences while also serving to further Mather’s beliefs in the superiority and civility of Christianity. As such, by

³¹ Paul Baepler, “The Barbary Captivity Narrative in Early America,” 95, 114. Gee’s son Rev. Joshua Gee served preached with Cotton Mather at Boston’s North Church.

³² *Ibid.*, 95.

³³ Salé was a Moroccan port and home port of the Salé Rovers, a well known group of Moroccan corsairs.

³⁴ Cotton Mather, “The Glory of Goodness,” in *White Slaves, African Masters*, 61-62

classifying the captors as savage and uncivilized, Mather was implying that Christians stood in opposition to this behavior, ironically ignoring his influence on the barbaric nature of the Salem Witch trials which took place a decade before the publication of *The Glory of Goodness*.

Despite a rise in rational thought since Mather's time, the existence of the 'other' in America still led to consideration of what separated "civilized" Americans from their savage or barbarous contemporaries at the close of the eighteenth century. In many of these cases it was Native Americans and enslaved Africans who represented the "other" in contrast to white, Christian American colonists. The transient nature of many Native American societies, coupled with what Europeans saw as unorthodox religious practices and gender roles, place Native Americans squarely within Brown's definition of a barbaric culture.³⁵ Thus, colonial perceptions of Native Americans can be used to begin to understand the shifts in perceptions of the Barbary pirates from the beginning to the end of the eighteenth century.

Following the French and Indian War, settlement restrictions and territorial disputes placed Native Americans further into conflict with colonists. The Proclamation of 1763, issued by the British, outlawed colonial settlers in

all the Lands and Territories not included within the Limits of Our said
Three new Governments, or within the Limits of the Territory granted to
the Hudson's Bay Company, as also all the Lands and Territories lying to

³⁵ African slaves in America found themselves in a similar position to that of Native Americans as a result of the limitations placed upon their lifestyles by their masters. The legal obstacles preventing the majority of slaves from learning to read or taking part in church-recognized weddings hampered the development of a literary culture and the church's sanction of sexual relations among slaves. This in turn, forced African slaves into what can be characterized as an unchristian and barbaric existence, according to the pre-established definitions. Since these societal factors were forced upon slaves by their white masters through a uniquely paternalistic relationship, however, any comparison of "barbarism" between slaves and Native Americans would be fundamentally flawed.

the Westward of the Sources of the Rivers which fall into the Sea from the West and North West as aforesaid.³⁶

While the Proclamation is most well-known as being one of the long term causes of the American Revolution, it also provides insight into how Americans reacted when their perceived rights to land were limited as a result of a barbaric presence. The colonists were angered when the British issued the Proclamation, which would not have been necessary if Native Americans were not perceived as a threat to colonists in the area. The Proclamation came on the heels of one of the greatest Native American uprisings of the period, Pontiac's Rebellion. This rebellion saw Indians abandoning tribal identities for a "red" identity—which reinforced a sense of otherness for "white" colonists. This put Native Americans in direct conflict with the colonial belief that the frontier not only belonged to them, but was also necessary for their economic prosperity. This belief that rights and access to land, resources, and markets were essential to a nation's survival would go on to become an integral part of early republican ideology.³⁷

John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon were unquestionably influential in developing the revolutionary ideology which led to American independence as the well known authors of *The Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*. They also, however, helped further the belief that Muslims were uncivilized and oppressive. While Mather argued against Islam from a devout Puritan stance, Trenchard and Gordon did so as "profound

³⁶ Yale Law School, "Avalon Project - The Royal Proclamation - October 7, 1763," Lillian Goldman Law Library, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/proc1763.asp (accessed February 21, 2010). This territory is more commonly described as all land west of the Appalachian Mountains.

³⁷ For further reading on Native American identity and American-Native relations see Gregory Evans Dowd's *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); or Nancy Shoemaker's *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004).

influence[s] on the development of early American attitudes toward liberty and representative government.”³⁸ These writers argued that all Muslim powers, and in particular the Ottoman Empire, practiced oppression, specifically citing that,

in *Turkey*, Printing is forbid, *Enquiry* is dangerous, and Free-speaking is CAPITAL; because they are all inconsistent with the *MAHOMETANISM by Law established*. Hence it comes to pass that the wretched *Turks* are all stupidly ignorant, are all Slaves, all Infidels.³⁹

Trenchard and Gordon’s ideas, expressed in *The Independent Whig* and *Cato’s Letters*, were “widely disseminated among the American colonists on the eve of the revolution” and such bold statements about Islam would have, undoubtedly entered into the mind of the American public.⁴⁰ Therefore, only a few brief years after the Revolution, when the Barbary pirates began attacking American shipping, the American populous would have been well aware of the tyranny of Muslim rulers and the threat which they posed to the infant republic. Furthermore, just as the presence of Native Americans west of the Appalachian Mountains resulted in Americans feeling as though their economic expansion was being restricted in the 1760s, so too did the Barbary pirates’ disruption of American commerce in the Mediterranean two decades later. Barbary interference with

³⁸ Kevin J. Hayes, “How Thomas Jefferson Read the Qur’an,” *Early American Literature* 3, no. 2 (2004): 250.

³⁹ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *The Independent Whig* in David L. Jacobson, ed, *The English Libertarian Heritage: From the Writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon in The Independent Whig and Cato’s Letters* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 35. The writings of John D. Foss, one of the American captives illustrates that in Algiers those of Turkish descent were in charge of the government and law making. As such, in the eyes of many Americans of the time, any observations about the Ottoman Empire would also hold true for Algiers. John D. Foss, “A Journal, of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; several years a prisoner in *Algiers*: Together with some account of the treatment of Christian slaves when sick:—and observations on the manners and customs of the Algerines” (Newburyport, MA: A., 1798) in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 87.

⁴⁰ Raymond M. Hyser and J. Chris Arndt, eds, *Voices of the American Past: Documents in U.S. History* 4th edition 2 vols (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008)1:59.

American shipping began with the seizure of the merchant vessel *Betsy* by a group of Moroccan pirates known as the Salle Rovers on October 11, 1784. This action marked the beginning of a struggle for free trade in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean which lasted until 1815.⁴¹

⁴¹ Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 52.

Chapter Two

The Debate over Tribute: Thomas Jefferson and John Adams

Despite the differences between American and Barbary societies, either real or exaggerated, to which Mather, Trenchard, and Gordon draw attention, the *Betsy* was not captured as an act of anti-Christian aggression by “those Hellish Pyrates.”¹ It was, instead, a politically motivated action designed to punish Americans for a perceived political slight. Following the Declaration of Independence, Morocco was the first nation to grant political recognition to the United States. The sultan of Morocco, Sidi Muhammad, had even gone so far as to attempt to open commercial relations with the United States, issuing a

declaration on December 20, 1777, announcing that all vessels sailing under the American flag could freely enter Moroccan ports. The Sultan stated that orders had been given to his corsairs to let the ships *des Americans* and those of other European states with which Morocco had no treaties...pass freely into Moroccan ports.²

As one of the most progressive rulers both along the Barbary Coast, the Moroccan sultan sought to improve his own economy by fostering trade with nations which Morocco previously had no formal diplomatic relations. As such, although America had no treaty with Morocco and was in the midst of a war against England, Sultan Muhammad felt it was in the best interest of his nation to grant American vessels the right to “take

¹ Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4.

² Sherrill Wells, “Long-time Friends: Early U.S.-Moroccan Relations, 1777-87,” *Department of State Bulletin* 87 (1987), 4.

refreshments' and provisions and enjoy the same privileges as other nations that had treaties with Morocco" once they were inside Moroccan ports.³

Just as Sultan Muhammad was eager to improve relations with America through reaching out to the newly independent nation, the fledgling United States also hoped to take advantage of such a generous offer and further develop such a promising relationship. As such, American consuls quickly forwarded the sultan's declaration to their government; however, it took approximately four months and another, almost identical declaration for Sidi Muhammad's intentions to reach Benjamin Franklin in Paris. Despite a relatively quick initial response by the Americans, between fighting the Revolutionary War and attempting to establish commercial and diplomatic relations with Europe after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the young nation was unable to continue international trade. Thus, they were unable to invest the necessary time or manpower into the development of better relations with Morocco.⁴

After waiting almost six years for an acceptable American response, the sultan ordered the seizure of an American shipping vessel to get America's attention and force the young nation to deal politically with Morocco.⁵ The vessel which they captured was the *Betsy*, a Philadelphia merchant brigantine under the command of Captain James Erwin, which was trading in the Mediterranean. Despite seizing the American vessel, the

³ Wells, "Long-time Friends," 4. America was not the only nation to benefit from this declaration, it was extended to many other states with which Morocco did not already have a treaty.

⁴ "Report of the Secretary of State relative to the Mediterranean Trade. Communicated to the House of Representatives, December 30, 1790, and to the Senate, January 3, 1791" in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers* 6 vols, ed. Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S. Navy (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939-44), 1:22.

⁵ Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 3-4.

sultan assured the United States that he had no intention of either enslaving the *Betsy*'s crew or claiming its cargo for himself. This event was a political maneuver on the part of sultan Muhammad, which he used to demand America's attention and respect, rather than a barbaric activity one might expect from reading Cotton Mather's letter or sermon. This work just as the sultan intended.⁶ In response, America quickly opened diplomatic channels with Morocco and began negotiations for both a treaty and the release of the *Betsy*'s crew and cargo.⁷

With the sacrifices of the American Revolution so recent in the minds of most Americans, such an affront to the personal liberties of the captured Americans caused an understandable outrage among Americans at home. A world in which American shipping was continuously seized and travel and trade in both the Atlantic and Mediterranean constantly carried the threat of capture and enslavement "was not the world the Americans had envisioned when they severed ties with Great Britain. Long restrained by Britain's Navigation Acts, nearly all Americans wished to be freed from the old colonial trade restrictions, and many embraced the principle of free trade."⁸

While the Moroccan capture of the *Betsy* brought the threat of piracy to the forefront of the minds of a new generation of Americans, especially those at the head of the young republic, the actions of Algiers raised another, even more sinister concern:

⁶Ray W. Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776-1816*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 8. Emperor of Morocco to Consuls at Tangier, May 7, 1788, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers* 6 vols, ed. Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S. Navy (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939-44), 1:17.

⁷Emperor of Morocco to the Congress of the United States, about August 16, 1786, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:13.

⁸Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 4.

slavery.⁹ On July 25, 1785, barely two weeks after the *Betsy*'s release, Algerine corsairs seized the American merchant vessel *Maria*, a schooner out of Boston, and within a week they took the *Dauphin* of Philadelphia as well. The difference between these seizures and the seizure of the *Betsy*, was that the dey, or ruler, of Algiers issued no declaration vowing to protect the crew and property of either American ship. Thus, the successful negotiation for Morocco's release of the captured crew of the *Betsy*, while a relief to those with ties to American shipping, by no means marked the end to piracy against the United States. In fact, it signaled the beginning of a much darker period in American history, one in which dozens of American vessels and hundreds of American citizens were captured and imprisoned or enslaved by the remaining states along the Barbary Coast. As a result, Americans found themselves physically enslaved on foreign soil less than two years after the Treaty of Paris was supposed to have recognized American independence and guarantee their political and ideological liberty.

Americans had reason to be afraid of imprisonment by the Barbary corsairs. Not only did enslavement disrupt their republican worldview, but stories began circulating of the horrors which one faced upon being captured. A letter written by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in 1786 after a meeting with the Tripolitan ambassador in London details how corsairs from the Barbary Coast boarded vessels and took prisoners. The Tripolitan ambassador told Adams and Jefferson,

⁹“Report of the Secretary of State relative to the Mediterranean Trade. Communicated to the House of Representatives, December 30, 1790, and to the Senate, January 3, 1791” in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:23-4. Gary E. Wilson, “American Hostages in Moslem Nations, 1784-1796: The Public Response,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 125.

That it was their law that the first who boarded an Enemy's Vessell should have one slave, more than his share with the rest, which operated as an incentive to the most desperate Valour and Enterprise, that it was the Practice of their Corsairs to bear down upon a ship, for each sailor to take a dagger in each hand and another in his mouth, and leap on board, which so terrified their Enemies that very few stood against them, that he verily believed the Devil assisted his Countrymen, for they were almost always successful.¹⁰

Despite not being a firsthand account, it suggests many of the sentiments which figure prominently into other firsthand accounts of Barbary captivity.

One of the earliest American Barbary captivity narratives was that of James Leander Cathcart who became the United States' consul general to the entire Barbary Coast.¹¹ Cathcart, along with five others, was aboard the schooner *Maria* when it was captured by Algerine pirates on July 25, 1785.¹² His account of the capture of the *Maria* paints a much more complex picture than that of Jefferson's letter. Cathcart writes:

I understood the Spanish language which they all spoke and was the only person on board who had any knowledge of the Barbary States... They were twenty-one in number and we were only six, which precluded the possibility of overpowering them had we been so imprudent as to have made an attempt. In this state of mind I remained more than two hours before we joined the Xebec, there being very little wind, and the first salutation we received was a shout from the whole crew of the Cruiser indicative of our being a good prize. We were then driven into the boat without being permitted to go into the cabin and taken on board the Cruiser and conducted to the quarter deck, every person having a pull at us

¹⁰ John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, "American Commissioners to John Jay, March 28, 1786" in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Julian P. Boyd, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 9:358.

¹¹ For further reading on the diplomatic relations between the United States and those of the Barbary Coast see Ray W. Irwin's *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776-1816* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1931); and Richard B. Parker's more recent study *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

¹² Paul Baepler, ed, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 103-4. Cathcart kept journals during his eleven years of captivity, which his daughter later compiled and published in 1899.

as we went along, in order to benefit by our capture. Our hats, handkerchiefs and shoes were the first articles that were taken from us.¹³

While the opening to Cathcart's discussion follows similar lines to the description given by Jefferson and Adams, the tone of his narrative quickly moves away from that of the previous letter. According to Cathcart,

We were welcomed on board by the Rais or Captain, a venerable old Arab, who had been a captive for several years, both in Spain and Genoa, and who was really a good man. "Christians," said he, "be consoled, this world is full of vicissitudes. You shall be well used, I have been a slave myself, and will treat you much better than I was treated; take some bread and honey and a dish of coffee and God will redeem you from captivity as he has done me twice, and, when you make your peace with your father, the King of England, the Dey of Algiers will liberate you immediately."¹⁴

Cathcart's references to the claims made by the Algerine captain speak to a much different motivation for captivity than that of the Tripolitan ambassador in Jefferson's letter.

While Jefferson's letter would lead one to believe that the motivations for piracy and the enslavement of European sailors were religiously based, the statements which Cathcart attributes to the Algerine captain are much more political. The captain assured Cathcart if America made peace with the King of England, they would be immediately set free, as the American sailors would once again fall under the protection of Britain's 1682 Treaty of Peace and Commerce.¹⁵ This reinforced accusations that the English were encouraging Barbary piracy against the Americans as punishment for the American

¹³ James Leander Cathcart, *The Captives, Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers*, in *White Slaves, African Masters*, 107-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Revolution.¹⁶ This possible political motivation aligned the Algerines with the British as oppressors and enemies of republicanism in the eyes of many Americans, and even led to some Americans condemning the British for “setting loose Algerine pirates on American citizens and their property” and plotting with “Spain, Portugal, Russia, and even with the Algerines to destroy the liberties of France and America.”¹⁷

Not all of what Cathcart says about his capture, however, suggests that he believed that the Algerines were “good” men. Cathcart goes on to detail the barbaric conditions which the American captives were held during their return voyage to Algiers:

Let imagination conceive what must have been the sufferings of forty-two men, shut up in a dark room in the hold of a Barbary Cruiser full of men and filthy in extreme, destitute of every nourishment, and nearly suffocated with heat, yet here we were obliged to remain every night until our arrival at Algiers...[When] we were permitted to come upon deck and were regaled with some very bad black olives, mixed with a small quantity of rank oil, and some vinegar to which was added some very coarse bread and water, which was corrupted, and which we were, literally, obliged to strain through our teeth, and while we drink, to stop our noses.¹⁸

The vivid description which Cathcart provides of the hold he was kept in during the return journey to Algiers further contradicts any positive description of the Algerine captain. This, in turn, clearly establishes the pirates as a threat to the civility of the American sailors. Treating the American sailors in such a savage manner was an affront

¹⁶ *United States Chronicle*, March 31, 1785. Many Americans at the time were quick to link the oppressive nature of the British to the piratical practices of the Barbary corsairs. This belief, coupled with an understanding that England would benefit economically from hindering American trade, made it very easy for Americans to jump to the conclusion that the British were, if not supporting or encouraging, at least hoping for Barbary harassment of American shipping.

¹⁷ *Aurora General Advertiser*, May 15, 1794. Quoted in Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785-1816*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 124.

¹⁸ James Leander Cathcart, *The Captives, Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers*, in *White Slaves, African Masters*, 108; The Americans were not the only sailors which this vessel seized on this particular outing. Thirty-six other men and one woman had also been captured.

to their republican values. By treating Americans in this way, the Algerines were forcing the American sailors into a position of inferiority and barbarism themselves, similar to how Americans viewed African slaves. By treating the American sailors as inferiors, the Algerines were overturning the American worldview of free, white men as superior to other races. According to Peter Onuf, during this time, for many Americans “thinking about race began with the image of a powerless people or captive nation, the inverse of the American’ consensual community.”¹⁹ Thus, the Algerines’ actions forced Americans into the role of the powerless people and out of the “consensual community” of which they believed they were entitled to be a part. For Cathcart and his fellow captives, this was a fact which became more pronounced once they landed in Algiers and truly began their tenure as slaves.

Cathcart’s narrative “represented the Algerines’ utterly arbitrary and despotic exercise of power as complemented by cringing servility.”²⁰ While Cathcart’s narrative elaborates on the barbarous practices of the corsairs, he also provides more positive references to the corsair’s actions in an attempt to provide a balanced account. Cathcart goes so far as to attribute his survival aboard the vessel to the kindness of other corsairs:

We must have inevitably have perished, had it not been for some Turks, who were more charitable than the rest who gave us some onions, oranges, raisins and figs from their own private stores. I likewise...actually learned

¹⁹Peter S. Onuf, “‘To Declare Them a Free and Independent People’: Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson’s Thought,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no.1 (Spring 1998): 16.

²⁰ Joanne Pope Melish, “Emancipation and the Em-bodiment of ‘Race’: The Strange Case of the White Negroes and the Algerine Slaves” in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, Janet Moore Linderman and Michele Lise Tarter eds., (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 229.

to smoke, by the kindness of the ship's steward, who gave me a pipe and tobacco, and whom I lived to repay, at Algiers more than two years after.²¹

Despite Cathcart's attempts to show the civil side of his captors, this was not how many of the Americans at home would have chosen to view reports of captivity coming from the Barbary Coast. Joanne Pope Melish argues,

When personal stories of enslavement by "tawny" Arabs and "dusky" or "swarthy" Moors of unbridled savagery began to surface in the United States, Americans were prepared to read these stories as tests of the durability of republican whiteness, in somewhat the way earlier generations had read narratives of the captivity of colonists by native peoples as tests of the durability of Christian faith.²²

According to Onuf, Americans such as Thomas Jefferson believed, "Enslavement and expatriation had deprived Africans of their natural rights, even as captivity defined their national identity."²³ Thus, Americans reading the captivity narratives from Africa questioned whether or not their republican men could withstand enslavement by a barbaric people, or if their imprisonment had created a new identity for the captives. Furthermore, they further questioned the racial basis for their enslavement of Africans and whether the master-slave relationship that relied so heavily on racial differences might be inverted.²⁴ This line of reasoning brought into question the strength of their social system, and would have eventually led Americans to wonder if, "Under radically

²¹ James Leander Cathcart, *The Captives, Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers*, in *White Slaves, African Masters*, 108-9.

²² Melish, "Emancipation and the Em-bodiment of 'Race,'" 228-9.

²³ Onuf, "'To Declare Them a Free and Independent People,'" 16.

²⁴ Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive; or, The Life and Adventures of Dr. Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines* (1797; repr., New York: Modern Library, 2002), 144. This is a fictional account, but it provides some insight into the views of the period.

different environmental conditions, enslaved in a tropical climate by a ‘savage’ people of color, could free white American become slavlike?”²⁵

The possibility that Americans could become “slavlike” as a result of captivity strikes at the heart of why the Barbary Wars were essential in both defining and defending the United States’ republican values. America’s victory over England in the American Revolution resulted in, among other things, wealthy, white American males ascending to the uppermost levels of an increasingly democratic society, no longer subject to royal officials or Parliament. The possibility, however, that American men, republican men, could be forced into servitude under an uncivilized race was not a threat with which Americans had yet come into contact. America’s political response to the threat from the Barbary states was vital as it would provide a precedent for dealing with threats to republican ideals in the future.

As concerns at home over slavery in Africa continued to rise, it became paramount that a solution to the problem of Barbary piracy be found as soon as possible. To accomplish such a task, several of the most prominent American politicians became personally involved in negotiating settlements with the Barbary powers. In March of 1786, while on diplomatic assignment in France, Thomas Jefferson found himself presented with an opportunity to do just that. When John Adams, the American minister to England at the time, was invited to meet with Sidi Haji Abdrahamn, the Tripolitan ambassador in London, he sent word to Jefferson in Paris to join him and assist with

²⁵ Melish, “Emancipation and the Em-bodiment of ‘Race,’” 228.

negotiations and “soon after the arrival of Mr. J in London, we had a conference with the Ambassador of Tripoli, at his House.”

The meeting, however, was not as fruitful as either Adams or Jefferson had hoped, as it was determined “that 30,000 Guineas for his Employers and £3,000 for himself were the lowest terms upon which a perpetual peace could be made.” It was further agreed that this sum “Must be paid in Cash on the delivery of the treaty signed by his sovereign [Yusuf Karamanli, the Bashaw of Tripoli, and] that no kind of Merchandizes could be accepted” in lieu of cash. Abdrahamn assured the Americans “that Tunis would treat upon the same terms, but he could not answer for Algiers or Morocco.”²⁶ This meant that the United States would be forced to pay a sum of 60,000 Guineas to assure that the two least powerful countries along the Barbary Coast did not harass their shipping. In the end, the Americans were unable to accomplish anything at this meeting, beyond assurances that both Tunis and Tripoli would be willing to treat with the United States. According to Adams, “We took time to consider and promised an answer, but we can give him no other, than that the demands exceed our Expectations, and that of Congress, so much that we can proceed no further without fresh instructions.”²⁷ Jefferson and Adams claimed that, “The amount of all the information that we can obtain from [Sidi Abdrahamn] was that a perpetual peace was in all respects the most advisable.”²⁸ As such, the meeting resulted in no real progress for either ending piracy or freeing any of the captives, as the monetary demands of the Barbary states were simply too high for the Americans.

²⁶ John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, “American Commissioners to John Jay, March 28, 1786” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 9, 358.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Since Jefferson and Adams were left with no official direction on how to proceed, each man quickly developed his own opinion as to how peace should be secured. Jefferson favored confronting the Barbary states with a show of force to ensure peace, “because a temporary treaty would leave room for increasing demands upon every renewal of it, and a stipulation for annual payments would be liable to failures of performance which would renew the war.”²⁹ Furthermore, Jefferson refused to accept such a subservient, tributary position for the United States. In a letter to Adams, Jefferson writes,

If it is decided that we shall buy a peace, I know no reason for delaying the operation, but should rather think it out to be hastened; but I should prefer the obtaining it by war.

1. Justice is in favor of this opinion. 2. Honor favors it. 3. It will procure us respect in Europe; and respect is a safeguard of interest. 4. It will arm the federal head with the safest of all instruments of coercion over its delinquent members, and prevent it from using what would be less safe. I think that so far, you go with me. But in the next steps, we shall differ. 5. I think it is least expensive. 6. Equally effectual.³⁰

To best understand why Jefferson and Adams chose the stances on how to confront Barbary piracy which they did, it is essential to have an understanding of the broader context of their views on what was best for the United States. Adams’ supporters, both in Massachusetts and the politicians that were eventually considered Federalists, relied heavily on the support of merchants and manufactures from the more urban North for the majority of their basis of political power. As a result, Adams and his brethren found themselves, by way of their constituents, tied closely to the shipping industry.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Paris, July 11, 1786, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:10.

Thus, as it was those connected to shipping who had the most emphatic reaction to Barbary seizures, Adams understood that it was in the best interest of his constituents to deal with the threat of piracy as quickly and efficiently as possible, and to Adams, this involved paying tribute.³¹

As Adams saw it, paying tribute was the only logical option for dealing with the Barbary states. Since most European nations agreed to pay tribute rather than engage the corsairs in battle, Adams believed that it was perfectly acceptable for the United States to do the same. Furthermore, because the nations of Europe had failed to put an end to Barbary piracy after more than two centuries, Adams did not believe that the United States would be capable of dealing any sort of crushing military blow to the Barbary states. He also understood that the United States would be utterly unable to achieve victory before American merchants lost more money, because at this time the United States had no navy. A navy, then, would have to be built almost from scratch before it could be ready for operations in the Mediterranean. As a result, Adams wished to maintain order, an important part of his political ideology, and force immediate and definite assurances of peace through negotiation and tribute. He argued,

Congress will never, or at least not for years, take any such resolution, and in the mean time our trade and honor suffers beyond calculation. We ought not fight them all, unless we determine to fight them forever. This thought, I fear, is too rugged for our people to bear. To fight them at the expense of millions, and make peace, after all, by giving more money and larger

³¹ “Report of the Secretary of State relative to the Mediterranean Trade. Communicated to the House of Representatives, December 30, 1790, and to the Senate, January 3, 1791” in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:22-4. Wilson, “American Hostages in Moslem Nations,” 133.

presents than would now procure perpetual peace, seems not to be economical.³²

While Adams argued for a more reserved and, what he believed to be, reliable approach to dealing with piracy, Jefferson claimed that armed opposition to the Barbary pirates, and by extension an overt defense of republican values and liberty, was the only acceptable response. Jefferson's most tangible argument for war was based on financial concerns. In a letter detailing his attempts at negotiating with Algiers, John Lamb, the American commissioner to Algiers, states, "Your Excellency sees how feable we are. I have good reason to think that peace may be made with these People but it will cost a Tower to Constantinople."³³ Lamb's letter goes on to estimate the size of an American naval squadron that would be needed if force were to be used to rescue the crews of *Maria* and *Dauphin*, an expenditure which he feels would be much less costly to the young nation. Lamb's estimations bolstered Jefferson's argument for war by stressing that it would be highly unlikely for the federal government to procure enough money to buy peace with Algiers.³⁴

While Adams represented the interests of the manufacturers, Jefferson found himself ideologically aligned with small, rural farmers. Jefferson's support for small farmers stemmed not only from his belief in the importance of the "everyman" for the continued functioning of the republic, but also the fact that large-scale farmers and businesses were "committed to a perpetual and unjust war against a captive people,

³² John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, London, July 31, 1786, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:11-2.

³³ John Lamb, "From John Lamb, March 29, 1786" in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 9:364.

³⁴ Ibid.

slaveowners could never love their country or pursue the ways of peace as did the yeoman patriots.”³⁵ Despite owning slaves himself, Jefferson believed that those who did not own or need slaves to be more patriotic and supportive of true American independence; thus demonstrating not only that Jefferson believed slavery was contrary to the values of the republic, but also hinting at the high value which he placed on masculine, hardworking, and self-sufficient yeoman farmers. Many of these values, however, were under threat by the corsairs. While American captives may have been hard working while imprisoned in Africa, they were most certainly not self-sufficient, and more importantly, they were forced into a subservient and servile position. Such a position ran contrary to the powerful, masculine, and patriarchal role which Jefferson believed white, republican men inhabited and to which they were entitled. To Jefferson, the assurance of free trade abroad and open access to markets was vital to continued liberty and economic success at home.³⁶ Thus, allowing the Barbary states to interfere with American trade would not only have violated the principles of the American Revolution, but could have also presented a threat to the continued existence of the republic.

While Jefferson was not a small farmer, he understood all too well the tension that a lack of available land could create for struggling yeoman farmers. Jefferson, like many others, had witnessed the reaction to England’s Proclamation of 1763 and knew the political problems that could plague the United States if such a situation ever arose again. Just as the eventual acquisition and exploration of the Louisiana Purchase demonstrated

³⁵ Onuf, ““To Declare Them a Free and Independent People,”” 18. In his article Peter Onuf argues that Jefferson viewed American slavery as a war against masters and slaves, and that peace and complete American independence could never be achieved until this conflict was resolved.

³⁶ Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 186.

Jefferson's commitment to expand the United States in an effort to avoid complications over land, so too did Jefferson's insistence on meeting the Barbary threat with force. While Jefferson did not wish to acquire any land from the Barbary states, the ability to trade in new markets would have provided some of the same potential advantages as physically expanding the nation: the ability to acquire new natural resources, more markets to sell American goods, and the increase in trade and exports which would result.

Jefferson also understood the fiscal problems which Adams' plan posed for the small farmers whom Jefferson supported. In order to pay tribute to the Barbary states, Congress would have to find some way to raise these funds, almost certainly through taxing the American public. Under the Articles of Confederation, this was not a problem because the Articles denied the federal government the ability to tax; however, Congress gained this power following the ratification of the Constitution. Jefferson did not favor heavy taxation, as his later opposition to tariffs and Hamilton's Whiskey Tax demonstrated. He understood that agreeing to pay tribute to the Barbary states would require constant taxation of the American people to cover the costs. A war, he believed, would be much less expensive in the long term, and would thus save the American people from constant, heavy taxation.³⁷

In addition to the problems which Jefferson believed paying tribute would cause for his supporters, Jefferson placed a great deal of emphasis on the perception of America abroad. While Adams believed that it was acceptable to pay tribute because so many European nations did so as well, Jefferson believed that the young United States had to

³⁷ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Paris, July 11, 1786, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:10.

make a stand. Despite fighting for, and gaining, independence from one of the most powerful European nations, Jefferson felt as though America would be seen as weak if she did not also stand up to the much weaker Barbary states. This would also have been seen as abandoning the republican ideal of masculinity and strength. Jefferson did, however, understand that such a stance would prove costly for the American people.³⁸

The ideological differences between the United States and the Muslim world also pushed Jefferson to favor armed resistance to paying tribute. According to Jefferson and Adams' letter to John Jay regarding their meeting with the Tripolitan ambassador,

We took the liberty to make some inquiries concerning the Grounds of their pretensions to make war upon Nations who had done them no Injure, and observed that we considered all mankind as our friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation.

The Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the Laws of their Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledge their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as Prisoners, and that every Musselman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.³⁹

According to many of Jefferson's biographers, the ambassador's response came as somewhat of a shock to Jefferson. Jefferson had been studying the Qur'an since 1765 and in this time he had come to understand it primarily as a relatively fair legal document which he incorporated into his own legal thinking.⁴⁰ As such, this encounter proved to be

³⁸ Ibid., 10-1.

³⁹ John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, "American Commissioners to John Jay, March 28, 1786" in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 9:358.

⁴⁰ Hayes, "How Thomas Jefferson Read the Qur'an," 252.

“an object lesson regarding the profound danger that could come from relying on a single text without recourse to supplementary texts and alternative interpretations.”⁴¹

While Jefferson was completing his study of the law, Frieheer von Pufendorf’s *Of the Law and Nature and Nations* was the standard text on natural law, and one in which Jefferson developed an interest. To Kevin Hayes, “Pufendorf’s work reflects a prejudice against Islam characteristic of the time in which it was written”; however, he does allow for several instances of the positive influence of Islamic law.⁴² Pufendorf writes,

And Christians should all the more zealously undertake to compose the quarrels of others, because even the Koran...teaches that if two Moslem nations and countries engage one another in war, the rest shall make peace between them, and compel him who committed the injury to offer satisfaction; and when it is done, bring them by fair and good means to friendship.⁴³

While Jefferson would have, no doubt, picked up on the derogatory tone of such a passage and its reference to “even the Koran” and would have been even more aware of it two decades later, the views of Pufendorf and others would have still played heavily upon Jefferson’s mind. Thus, while Jefferson saw the Qur’an itself as an important legal document and understood the benefits and advantages of Islamic law, outside influences, including the corsairs’ own actions and other writings denouncing the tyrannical nature of Islamic leaders, also shaped his thinking.

The impact which reading Trenchard and Gordon must have had on Jefferson, and much of his generation, cannot be ignored because they were so influential in shaping

⁴¹ Ibid., 257.

⁴² Ibid., 247.

⁴³ Samuel Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*, trans C. H. Oldfather and W.A. Oldfather (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934), 2:831 quoted in Hayes, “How Thomas Jefferson Read the Qur’an,” 248.

America's revolutionary ideology. By using the Ottoman Empire as their example of an oppressor nation, Trenchard and Gordon helped to establish Islamic ideology and customs as contrary to those of the United States.⁴⁴ Thus, having read Trenchard and Gordon, Jefferson, with his belief in fighting to defend liberty and republicanism, would have had no other choice but to forcibly oppose the Barbary powers, who were culturally similar tributaries to the Ottomans. Anything less would have meant acquiescing to the demands of an even more tyrannical power than England.

Jefferson's and Adams' differing opinions on how to confront the issue of Barbary piracy reflect the differing views that were arising in America over how the young nation should be shaped and governed. While Adams's ideology supported a more orderly, pragmatic approach focused on a guaranteed solution which would benefit northern merchants with ties to the shipping industry, Jefferson supported military action which, in his mind, would result in fewer taxes overall for the majority of Americans. Furthermore, Jefferson's willingness to use force to confront piracy demonstrates the close connection he saw between liberty and free trade. Both of which he believed to be essential to the survival of the republic. Thus, while Adams saw the threat of Barbary piracy as a threat to America's economic prosperity, Jefferson saw it as a threat to the core republican values on which America itself was founded.

Jefferson and Adams remained locked in this debate over how best to deal with the Barbary pirates until the early 1790s, when the continued lack of federal funds to pay tribute and further seizures by Algerine corsairs made military action the only viable

⁴⁴ Hayes, "How Thomas Jefferson Read the Qur'an," 250.

option.⁴⁵ In response, Congress passed “An Act to provide a Naval Armament” on March 27, 1794, (also known as the Naval Act of 1794), which called for the construction or acquisition of up to six vessels to form the core of the United States’ naval force.⁴⁶ In 1798, Congress’ decision to pass the Naval Act paid off when America engaged in a series of small naval engagements with French ships. This undeclared naval war, or Quasi-War against Napoleonic France, during the closing years of the eighteenth century demonstrated to the United States that they could not remain shut off from the Old World. Furthermore, this proved that America’s naval forces would be instrumental in not only protecting the nation at home, but also vital for ensuring American prosperity abroad.⁴⁷

This was the mindset in which America found itself when Thomas Jefferson entered the office of the president in 1801. For Jefferson, his swearing in brought with it renewed demands for tribute, this time from Tripoli. Based on his belief in the importance of economic freedom and resistance to tyranny, Jefferson flatly refused the Bashaw’s demands. Less than two months later the United States found itself plunged into a war to defend both its right to free trade and Jefferson’s views of republicanism.

⁴⁵ *An Act to provide a Naval Armament*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess. (March, 27, 1794), in *The public statutes at large of the United States of America* (Washington D.C.: Congress, 1789-1875), 1:350.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ For further reading on the Quasi War see Howard P. Nash, *The Forgotten Wars: The Role of the U.S. Navy in the Quasi War with France and the Barbary Wars, 1789-1805* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1968).

Chapter Three

Barbary Captivity Narratives: Challenges to Republican Manhood

While it may seem as though the fifteen years between the first seizures of American vessels by Barbary corsairs and the start of the Tripolitan War were uneventful, this time was crucial in shaping Americans' beliefs on republican ideology. During this period, while constantly under threat of Barbary imprisonment, the divide between a republican, American "self" and an uncivilized "other" grew more pronounced. While Cathcart's account illustrates the experience of being captured by Barbary corsairs, it is essential to further investigate the numerous captivity narratives which Americans wrote regarding their imprisonment along the Barbary Coast. Such analysis provides insight into not only the captives' experiences, but it also sheds light on how the experiences of slavery and imprisonment contradicted many of the republican values which these captives held. First and foremost, these narratives demonstrate a clear deprivation of the captives' liberty. Simply by enslaving the Americans, their captors provided the most marked challenge to republican values. Less prominent, but no less significant, was the disruption of the paternal, social system to which many of these men were accustomed. The simple fact that nonwhites held higher social rank was an emasculating prospect. These narratives also bring to light the tensions that arose from the "civilized" Americans being held by "barbarous" pirates. The religious differences between the American Christians and their Muslim captors served as the basis for much of this unrest, however,

it was not its only source. Americans also grew apprehensive over the prospect of becoming less civilized through their captivity and servitude.

Depriving Americans of their physical liberty and freedom to trade was the most basic and visible threat which Barbary piracy and captivity posed to Americans. Americans were horrified to hear that their sailors were “torn from their country and everything dear to them...dragged on board ships of war of a foreign nation and exposed, under the most distant and deadly clime.”¹ This statement, however, was not about Barbary piracy. It is a portion of James Madison’s declaration for war against Great Britain in 1812 on the grounds of impressment and the violation of America’s neutral rights. The similarities between it and many comments about Barbary piracy, however, are quite telling.

The fact that Americans were being imprisoned and forced into servitude by the pirates, people they believed to be uncivilized and inferior, forced Americans to question the permanence of their value system. Impressment by the British, however, had no racial or religious undertones. It was simply an action which denied republican men their freedom. This, then, demonstrates that above all else, the loss of physical liberty was the biggest threat to republicanism faced by Americans, whether they were being captured by pirates or being impressed by the British. American captives of the Barbary pirates, however, faced many other significant challenges and threats to their ideas of liberty and republicanism.

¹ George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1952), 21-4, quoted in Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785-1816* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 192.

First and foremost among these other concerns was the threat which imprisonment and servitude posed to the manhood of a republican patriarch as “Barbary captivity, which was yet another step closer to slavery, emasculated its victims.”²

Lawrence Peskin argues that the threat to a captive’s manhood was not solely a result of his imprisonment and servile state, but it also stemmed from the reactions and perceptions of other republicans at home. He states,

Captivity itself has been feminized by a century-long American literary tradition of narratives that were, in large part, stories of damsels in distress. From at least the time of Mary Rowlandson’s capture by Indians in seventeenth-century Massachusetts down to the sensibility-laden tales of O’Brien’s and Cathcart’s day, most captives, and certainly the most popular literary ones, were women.³

Because of this American perception of captives as inherently feminine, any captive would have been viewed as less masculine because of their situation. Peskin goes on to argue that Americans not only thought of captives as feminine, but preferred it. “Despite that all the actual captives were men, the biggest selling narratives tended to be fictional accounts of women like Mary Velnet/ Maria Martin or the ladies in Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* who were in constant peril from their ‘barbarian’ captors.”⁴ This preference for female captivity narratives is likely as result of two factors within American thinking, the first being that women had a natural subservient role to men in American society, much like a captive to a captor. Secondly, if a man was a true republican man he would be able to throw off the chains of imprisonment and slavery and

² Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 139.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

assert his rights to liberty, just as the United States had done in the Revolutionary War. By this line of reasoning, an inability to do this would signify that a man was not a true a republican man and thus belonged in his proper, servile state, much like slaves or Native Americans.

Being imprisoned along the Barbary Coast did not only threaten the physical liberty and manhood of the American sailors unfortunate enough to be captured, but it also proved to be a threat to their power and social status as republican patriarchs. Since the beginning of England's North American colonization efforts, society was based on a strong belief in a paternalism, where the authority of the family and the state rested with the white male head of household.⁵ As the institution of slavery grew throughout the North American colonies, the superiority of the white patriarch was extended over slaves as well, as slaves were treated as childlike individuals for whom masters had to care.⁶ It was with this background which the American captives faced the prospect of their own imprisonment.

While Americans were used to caring for their slaves as though they were child-like, making the masters into father figures by contrast, this was no longer the case along the Barbary Coast. John D. Foss, a crew member on the brig *Polly*, captured while en route from Baltimore to Cadiz in September 1793, kept a journal of his experiences while in captivity. A brief part of one entry demonstrates Foss' reliance on the whims and

⁵ For further reading on colonial-era gender divisions, which were also present in the early nineteenth century, see Anthony Fletcher's *Gender, Sex, & Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) and Mary Beth Norton's *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

⁶ Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) is the most complete study of the role of paternalism in American slavery to date.

kindness of his new masters. After having his shirt taken from him upon his capture, Foss wrote that, “The next day an old Turk, with an air of kindness, gave me an old shirt without sleeves, blaming those who had taken mine from me. It was soothing to find a spark of humanity in my barbarous masters.”⁷ Here, Foss shows a dependence upon a person considered to be less civilized than himself. By relying on the Turk’s assistance, Foss shows that he is not self-sufficient and instead is in need of aid from someone he sees as a barbarian.

By making Foss and many of the other captives dependent upon them, and thus not self-sufficient, the Barbary captors deprived Americans of their patriarchal and masculine positions. Just as enslaved Africans in the United States had to rely on their masters for food, clothing, and shelter, so too did those imprisoned along the Barbary Coast. Despite an understanding that their liberties were being curtailed and they were being forced into a slave-like position, very few captives went so far as to “cross the color barrier and identify with enslaved Africans in any way.”⁸ By failing to relate with enslaved Africans within the United States, the captives demonstrated a desire to maintain their paternalistic society.

Foss further demonstrates that the captives would not accept any similarities between themselves and African slaves in the way in which he ends the letter introducing his narrative. Foss signs his letter, “Sincerely wishing that none of my fellow-citizens

⁷ John D. Foss, “A Journal, of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; several years a prisoner in *Algiers*: Together with some account of the treatment of Christian slaves when sick:—and observations on the manners and customs of the Algerines” (Newburyport, MA: A., 1798) in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 75.

⁸ Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 76.

may ever be so unhappy as to experience the miseries of Algerine slavery, I commend the following to their candor and patronage.”⁹ Throughout his narrative, however, he makes no comment which even hints at the enslavement of nonwhites as morally wrong. By acknowledging any similarities between themselves and slaves at home, such as how both Barbary captives and American slaves could both have their freedom purchased, American captives would have accepted their position as inferior to their own captors. They would then have forfeited their status as free republican men.

While the disruption of the social and class system which these captives had grown accustomed to threatened their views of themselves as republican men, so too did their perceptions of their captors as “barbarous” and “savage.” One of the key components to Americans’ perceptions of themselves was that they were a more civilized people and a large part of the idea of civility was wrapped up in their perception of the superiority of Christianity. Foss illustrates his feelings towards Islam and Muslims when describing how horrified Americans will be upon reading his narrative.

The tears of sympathy will flow from the humane and feeling, at the tale of hardships and sufferings of their unfortunate fellow countrymen, who had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the Algerines—whose tenderest mercies towards Christian captives, are the most extreme cruelties; and who are taught by the Religion of Mahomet (if that can be called a Religion which leads men to the commission of such horrid and bloody deeds) to persecute all its opposers.¹⁰

Foss’s claim that Islam should not even be thought of as a religion because of how its practitioners treat nonbelievers demonstrates the hostility Americans felt towards what they viewed as an oppressive state.

⁹ Foss, “A Journal,” in *White Slaves, African Masters*, 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

Part of the American aversion to Algiers undoubtedly stemmed from the perception that Algiers was neither democratic nor egalitarian. In Algiers, if a slave committed murder, they were punished differently depending upon the victim.

A slave for murder of another slave, is immediately beheaded. But for murder of a Mahometan he is cast off from the walls of the city, upon iron hooks, which are fastened into the wall about half way down.—these catch by any part of the body, that strikes them, and some times they hang in this manner in the most exquisite agonies for several days before they expire. But should the part that catches, not be strong enough to hold them (for sometimes the flesh will tear out,) they fall to the bottom of the wall and are dashed in pieces.¹¹

The inequality of these punishments demonstrates an unequal distribution of power, which many republicans would have seen as some level of corruption. According to Drew McCoy, a government free of corruption was an essential feature of a republic.¹² As a result, Algiers could, in no way be considered a republic based on this definition, and thus, American captives could expect no guarantee or protection of their republican values.¹³

The limits which imprisonment, slavery, and a “corrupt” legal system placed on republican liberty and the overturning of the captives’ world views may seem inevitable to contemporary thinking, given their circumstances. The idea that these captives would undergo physical changes as a result of enslavement, however, is something which was more deeply rooted in the perceptions of race during this period. During the colonial and

¹¹ Ibid., 83.

¹² Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 186.

¹³ It is of note that, once again the captives make no note of the similarities between the unequal legal treatment of whites and slaves in American society, which further demonstrates that republican values in America were limited to white men.

early republican periods, Americans and western Europeans believed that race and civilization were determined by climate.¹⁴ This led to the belief that if an individual from one climate was placed in a different climate, they would begin to change to resemble members of other societies which developed in the new climate. As the rugged Barbary Coast was much different than the United States' eastern seaboard, Americans saw a great, inherent difference between their culture and that of the "tawny Arabs."¹⁵

While these captives may not have become any more like their jailers, beyond a possible dark suntan, many of them did undergo physical changes in order to survive the experience. In a letter written to his wife upon his departure from Algiers, former captive Joel Barlow discusses the facial hair he grew while imprisoned, such a practice being uncustomary for fashionable American men at the time, but common for those along the Barbary Coast. Barlow writes,

Listen my idol. Since you are my goddess, I have a sacrifice to make for you, and it is necessary that you tell me if I much make it here or in Paris. I am wearing long moustaches, long, beautiful and black (a little grey however). Do you want me to cut them here, or do you want to see them and cut them yourself? Tell me, and I will obey you without the least resistance. I wager that you will tell me to cut them here, and I wager that you will be right.¹⁶

The importance which Barlow places on telling his wife that he has grown out his beard hints that this was more than a simple aesthetic decision. He continues,

¹⁴ Joanne Pope Melish, "Emancipation and the Em-bodiment of 'Race': The Strange Case of the White Negroes and the Algerine Slaves" in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, Janet Moore Linderman and Michele Lise Tarter ed., (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 228.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Joel Barlow, "Marseille, August 1, 1797" quoted in Milton Cantor, "A Connecticut Yankee in a Barbary Court: Joel Barlow's Algerian Letters to his Wife," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series 19, no. 1 (January 1962), 109.

Is it necessary to tell you why I have left them? There is a proverb which is only too true, although very humiliating for humanity, *who makes himself the lamb, the wolf eats*. No part of this proverb is so useful as in Barbary. I was earnest in arriving there, and as I am a lamb at heart, it was necessary to hide this character under the exterior of another animal. And my moustaches give me fairly well the air of a tiger. I attach no price to them except as the sole souvenir of the services which they have rendered me. I put them on your altar, pronounce on their fate.¹⁷

Barlow's letter demonstrates that while the climate may not have made him more like his Arab captors, he did have to undergo physical changes as a result of his captivity.

Furthermore, this letter illustrates the hostility republican men felt in having their civility driven from them. His reference to the proverb he quotes as "humiliating for humanity" shows that he feels that republican men should not be compared to animals; however, because of the circumstances of his captivity, he sees no other way to describe himself.

Barlow may not have had the republican values driven from him, but he was forced to decide between safety and a well groomed appearance. In this situation, Barlow's appearance can be equated with his culture and civility, something which separated him from his captors. Thus, in order to survive his experience, Barlow believed he must give up part of what defined him as an American and a republican man.

Therefore, in Barlow's case, it was not the climate or the actions of the pirates which caused a break with his civility, but instead his own conscious choice. Ironically, it was Barlow's decision to forsake his grooming practices to look less like the lamb he believed himself to be which demonstrates, more so than most of the pirates' actions, the impermanence of a republican identity. Barlow could have retained his previous appearance and endured the hardships of his captivity; however, his sense of self-

¹⁷ Ibid.

preservation won out. He chose instead to give into the demands of his situation, abandoning a physical manifestation of his civility as a result of the realities of imprisonment.

Not only were the captive Americans outraged and disheartened by the seizures, but Americans at home were deeply affected as well. The disruption of trade and the capture of American sailors were not only threats to the economy and the safety of American's mariners, but the seizure of sovereign, American merchant vessels was also a challenge to the republican ideology of the time. To Americans, the Barbary practice of enslaving republican men contradicted the core values upon which they based their nation and ideology. Thomas Paine echoed the beliefs of the American populous arguing, "The Algerine piracy may then be commanded to cease, for it is only by the malicious policy of old governments, against each other, that it exists."¹⁸

Despite how backwards and archaic Americans believed these Old World practices to be, they were a reality of the times and as such Americans were forced to find a way to confront them. The most logical way to deal with international incidents such as these seizures would have been through negotiations conducted by federally appointed officials. During the early years of America's dealings with the Barbary states, however, the Federal government's inability to tax under the Articles of Confederation resulted in the United States being unable to procure the funds necessary to ransom the captives.¹⁹ Even after the ratification of the Constitution, though, funding remained a problem for

¹⁸ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791; repr., London: Watts & Co., 1906), 148.

¹⁹ Yale Law School, "Avalon Project - Articles of Confederation: March 1, 1781," Lillian Goldman Law Library, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/artconf.asp (accessed April 3, 2010).

the American government.²⁰ Captain Isaac Stevens, one of the captives in Algiers, felt as though it would have been easy for Congress to pay for their release. In one petition to Congress, he wrote,

O Lord, how Long wilt thou turn a Deaf Ear to our Calamities and make Congress and Commonwealth the instruments of our Cruelty O Lord hear our petitions and praryers...only one Cargo of tobacco would Redeem us all or a Small Lottery in Each State.²¹

The federal government, however, still did not act. Congress, instead, continually proved itself to be ineffectual in both negotiating with the Barbary states and raising funds to obtain the captives' release. Americans began to believe that, "the union of the thirteen states is much too weak, even to combat the machinations of any petty Prince, however contemptible, who shall chuse to insult the American flag."²² Left with no other choice, American citizens took it into their own hands to free the captives.

Despite the ineffectiveness of Congress, petitions to the federal legislature were still one of the most common forms of civilian action aimed at freeing Barbary captives. As a result of Congress' inability to free the captives, American citizens were forced to resort to other methods to free the captives as well. Charity boxes in churches and boycotts of foreign goods were commonplace as well, however, the most significant and telling efforts to free the captives came from "Republican societies."²³ Much like the ideology of the young nation itself, the desire to see these captives liberated was not

²⁰ Gary E. Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations, 1784-1796: The Public Response," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 138.

²¹ Isaac Stevens quoted in Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations," 138.

²² *Pennsylvania Gazette*, (April 19, 1786), quoted in Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 99.

²³ Gary E. Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations," 134-7.

restrained by geographic differences. While the majority of the response came from port cities in New England, southern cities such as Augusta, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, contained their own groups focused on the liberation of the captives, and it was Philadelphia which had the single biggest response.²⁴

The goal of these societies was to defend the republican values of the captive Americans. Those that attended these meetings or donated money to help fund ransom demands were primarily concerned with the physical release of the captives. It was understood that freedom would bring an end to the “barbaric” influence of living as a slave. Thus, liberation meant that the captives would be able to reassert their masculine and patriarchal authority once again.²⁵ Unfortunately for the captives, despite the large turnout at some of these meetings, some in New York having over fifteen hundred attendees, these societies did not have the organization or the influence with which to force the government to act, much less secure an end to Barbary piracy against America’s merchant shipping.²⁶

While private citizens’ attempts to free large numbers of captives ultimately failed, attempts to free specific individuals proved much more successful. George Smith and William Patterson, both of whom were captured in 1785, were freed through private donations, while Captain John Bwinham’s relatives bought his release.²⁷ Despite being ineffectual on the whole, these attempts to free large numbers of the American captives

²⁴ Ibid., 135-6.

²⁵ Ibid., 136. The importance of the assertion of masculinity and power can be seen in the unanimous approval of one Philadelphian society to seize all vessels of any nation which had seized any American vessels.

²⁶ Ibid., 137.

²⁷ Ibid., 133.

turned into a political trail for the young government and “prompted the government to act more expeditiously on the matter.”²⁸

Regardless of their success, citizens’ attempts to secure the release of their fellow countrymen illustrates a widespread commitment to republican ideology. The simple fact that so many attended these events and donated money demonstrates a willingness within American society to sacrifice for other republicans and to work to ensure freedom for all, or all whom Americans at the time believed deserved it. These actions demonstrated that regular, republican citizens stood up against people they saw as tyrants and savages that were enslaving other Americans. Their stance represents a continuation of the previous generation’s revolutionary spirit which led to the break with Great Britain.²⁹

The citizens’ desire to circumvent the authority of the federal government also confirmed the growing sense of egalitarianism within the young nation. Since the federal government was unable to take action on behalf of the American captives, and by some accounts believed inaction was the best policy, other American citizens stepped in and attempted to free the prisoners.³⁰ By taking on such a responsibility themselves, these citizens illustrated a democratic distribution of power among the government and the populous of the new republic, reflective of the democratization which the United States

²⁸ Ibid., 141.

²⁹ The anti-Muslim sentiment throughout the writing of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, as well as their connection to the ideological origins of America’s revolutionary spirit and the variety of American officials quoted in Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 101-4, illustrate the ideological connection Americans made between the British and the Barbary pirates.

³⁰ Wilson, “American Hostages in Moslem Nations,” 141. Wilson argues that the American government hoped that by seeming poor and apathetic towards the fate of the Barbary captives, the pirates would lower tribute demands and cease harassing American shipping. The public’s response and outcry, however, made this impossible.

was undergoing in the early nineteenth century. Thus, they reinforced republican ideology through their battle to protect the freedom and civility of their fellow republicans.

Outrage was not the only emotion many Americans felt regarding the imprisonment of their countrymen along the Barbary Coast; there was also a great sense of fear. This arose not simply from the possibility that more Americans could be captured or from the threat piracy posed to America's economic prosperity, but also from the fear that if republican men could be held in servitude by men they considered to be uncivilized, then those men, and possibly all republican men, could have their civility driven from them.³¹ This possibility raised the fear that civility was impermanent and that all people, regardless of class, race, religion, and gender could devolve into savagery if placed in the correct situation. This fear, then, helped to propel regular American citizens into action to free the American captives and demonstrated to the United States government that action must be taken to secure the freedom of all Americans from enslavement in Africa.³² Therefore, when Tripoli declared war on the United States in 1801, Thomas Jefferson had no choice but to retaliate militarily. In response, he ordered a naval squadron to the Mediterranean to blockade the Tripolitan coast and force an end to hostilities against American shipping. Americans hoped that this war would secure America's freedom to trade while also asserting their manhood internationally.³³

³¹ Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive; or, The Life and Adventures of Dr. Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines* (1797; repr., New York: Modern Library, 2002), 144.

³² Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 136-40.

³³ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Paris, July 11, 1786, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:10

Chapter Four

Stephen Decatur, Jr.: A Case Study for the Republican Man

The seizures of so many American sailors and merchant vessels by Barbary pirates left many American's questioning the permanence of the republican values by which they had come to define themselves. The subjugation of republican men by non-white, non-Christian pirates proved to be the antithesis of the world-views of many Americans who believed in the superiority of white, American civilization. At this point, America needed a show of masculine and martial force, as well as some level of success against the Barbary pirates, in order to reassert the superiority of their system of values. Thomas Jefferson hoped that a forceful response, in this case to the Tripolitan declaration of war, would serve as that assertion. Unfortunately for the United States, however, the Navy would face many setbacks before Stephen Decatur, Jr., would rise up as the epitome of the republican man during this period. Decatur's successes, and subsequent accession to the top of the Jeffersonian meritocracy, at least in American eyes, demonstrated to rest of the world the superiority of republican ideology over Old World tyranny and barbarism.¹

For the United States, their success throughout the opening years of the war against Tripoli was comparable to their success in negotiating for the captives' release. In 1801, the United States government sent a squadron of vessels, under the command of

¹ "Report of the Secretary of State relative to the Mediterranean Trade. Communicated to the House of Representatives, December 30, 1790, and to the Senate, January 3, 1791" in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers* 6 vols, ed. Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S. Navy (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939-44), 1:24; Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Paris, July 11, 1786, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:10.

Commodore Richard Dale, to blockade Tripoli with the hopes of forcing the Bashaw of Tripoli to release the captives which he held. During his tenure in Tripoli, Dale was able to do little beyond “immobilizing a couple of Tripolitan warships” and “In fact, under his command the U.S. Squadron succeeded mainly in making the Bashaw more stubborn and contemptuous of Americans than ever.”² Therefore, when Dale returned to the United States in April 1802 because the one year enlistment period of his sailors was soon to expire, his request for Congress to create and then promote him to the rank of admiral was denied.

While Dale was the first American commander to meet failure in the Tripolitan War, he was not the last. Captain Richard Valentine Morris was the next man to take on the mantle of Commodore of America’s Mediterranean squadron. Morris, however, was as ineffectual as Dale, and after failing to “assert U.S. Prestige in the Mediterranean,” Morris was relieved of command and ordered to return to the United States for an official inquiry.³ The inquiry board, chaired by Captain Samuel Barron, found that Morris “might have acquitted himself well in the command of a single ship, under the orders of a superior, but he was not competent to the command of a squadron.”⁴

After two previous failures, Jefferson hoped that Commodore Edward Preble’s promotion to commander of the American squadron in the Mediterranean would improve America’s fortunes. Fortunately for the young republic, Jefferson’s hopes eventually

² A.B.C. Whipple, *To the Shores of Tripoli: The Birth of the U.S. Navy and Marines* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 81.

³ Ibid., 101.

⁴ “Concerning Commodore Morris’ squadron in the Mediterranean” in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 2:526-31.

came to fruition. Fletcher Pratt argues that, to at least some degree, the eventual success of Preble and the officers serving under him, affectionately referred to as “Preble’s Boys,” resulted from the relatively young age of Preble’s officers. Preble “succeeded in integrating them into the service; in making it important to them.”⁵ To Pratt,

There is also a genuine love-affair between Preble himself and the Jeffersonian democracy. He believed in its principles—partly from a professional point of view, for he quite agreed with Jefferson’s attitude that any tribute to the Barbary powers was morally wrong, and that resistance to them was not only patriotic, but in the long run wise. All his later years, while he lay dying, were spent in trying to make Jefferson’s gunboat program work...There is nothing to suggest that Preble was enamored of gunboats in themselves; but Jefferson wanted them, and that was sufficient for Edward Preble.⁶

Preble’s faith in Jefferson and Jeffersonian ideology, combined with Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith’s belief that, “the hope of the navy lay in its junior officers, the young midships who had known no other master” reflect early republican breaks with tradition in favor of innovation and youth. Furthermore, the fact that Preble’s tenure in the Mediterranean saw no court-martials demonstrates the honor and unity which Preble was able to instill in his subordinates through his strong belief in republican ideology, “American independence and self-respect, and...the respect of other governments for the United States.”⁷

⁵ Fletcher Pratt, *Preble’s Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power* (1950; repr., Cranbury, NJ: The Scholar’s Bookshelf, 2007), 403.

⁶ Ibid., 402. For more information about Jefferson’s gunboat program, see Spencer Tucker’s *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

⁷ Ibid., 403. Christopher McKee, *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography, 1761-1807* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1972), 315. McKee argues that Preble was an apolitical figure, and thus not associated with either the Federalists or the Jeffersonians. Preble’s belief in the importance of America receiving international respect, however, is in line with the republican ideology of the time that called for masculine assertions of republican values.

Despite the high hopes the American government had in Preble and his strong commitment to Jefferson's ideology, his time in command of the Mediterranean squadron was not without setbacks. The most significant of which was the capture of William Bainbridge's vessel, the *Philadelphia*. At approximately nine o'clock in the morning of October 31, 1803, the crew of the United States' frigate *Philadelphia*, while patrolling the waters less than twenty miles east of the city of Tripoli, spotted a vessel flying Tripolitan colors. America had been at war with Tripoli since 1801, a result of the African nation's many acts of piracy against American shipping in the Mediterranean Sea, and as such Bainbridge immediately ordered his men to give chase. After trailing the cruiser for two and a half hours, Bainbridge ordered his vessel to cease their pursuit, as the lone American ship was now within five miles of the heavily fortified Tripolitan harbor.⁸

As the *Philadelphia* changed course and began sailing north, away from the harbor, she ran aground of an uncharted shoal and became lodged upon the rocks. While Bainbridge and his crew attempted to weigh down the vessel's stern to dislodge its bow, several Barbary vessels began sailing out from the harbor to meet them. In his attempt to weigh down the stern, Bainbridge ordered the majority of the *Philadelphia*'s cannons pushed to the aft of the vessel. As a result of these attempts to free the ship from its position on the rocks, Bainbridge found himself with no means of defense when the Barbary gunboats approached. Bainbridge was soon forced to lower the Stars and Stripes and surrender his vessel and crew.

⁸ William Bainbridge (presumed) to unknown, Tripoli, February 18, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:432-3.

Bainbridge wrote almost immediately from his captivity in Tripoli to both his commanding officer, Commodore Edward Preble, and the Secretary of the Navy, Robert Smith, claiming that he had done everything in his power to avoid capture, save for blowing up the *Philadelphia* to keep it out of the hands of the pirates, and thus sacrificing his crew. In his own defense Bainbridge wrote, “I thought such conduct would not stand acquitted before God or Man, and I never presumed to think I had the liberty of putting to death 306 Souls because they were placed under my command.”⁹ Bainbridge, however, did relay to Preble the extensive damage done to the *Philadelphia* while the crew attempted to free her, leading Preble to believe that the former American vessel was vulnerable.

On February 15, 1804, Bainbridge wrote again to Preble. This time, after “having the liberty of walking out, and having seen the situation [the *Philadelphia*] is anchored in,” Bainbridge suggested that the ship’s destruction “could be easily effected” by a small American force.¹⁰ Bainbridge, after claiming to have been granted some level of freedom by the Bashaw of Tripoli and now aware of the position of his former vessel in the harbor, suggested to Preble that a ship “well prepared with combustibles” could easily be

⁹ William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, Tripoli, Barbary, October 31, 1803, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:174.

¹⁰ William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, Tripoli, Barbary, February 15, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:408. While this letter is dated 15 February 1803, it is plausible that it was not actually written until after the destruction of the *Philadelphia*, which took place the night of 16 February. It is unlikely that the Bashaw of Tripoli would have allowed Bainbridge to include any account of the defensive conditions of the harbor in any correspondence, especially correspondence to the commodore of the American fleet. Thus, it is possible that this letter was written after the *Philadelphia*’s destruction and simply backdated. Bainbridge’s record, prior to surrendering the *Philadelphia*, was not spotless and Bainbridge may have believed that creating the impression that he was attempting to supply Preble with valuable intelligence would have helped his standing within the American Navy.

sailed into the harbor and used to set fire to the *Philadelphia*, thus preventing the Bashaw from selling the repaired ship to the other Barbary states of Tunis or Algiers.¹¹

Unbeknownst to Bainbridge, as he was writing to Commodore Preble the very mission he was suggesting was already in progress. Two American vessels were anchored just over the horizon waiting for a favorable wind and the opportunity to strike. Thus, instead of resulting only in the captivity of more Americans and the strengthening of the Tripolitan fleet, the *Philadelphia*'s capture played an integral role in the rise to fame of one of the most highly praised figures in the Navy's early history: a man who would become renowned for his spirited and masculine defense of America's liberty and republican values.

The weather off the coast of Tripoli was relatively calm on the night of February 16, 1804, especially compared to the strong winds and rough seas of the previous week.¹² This peace, however, proved to be short lived as gunshots, cannon fire, and a massive explosion filled the harbor shortly after nine o'clock. The earsplitting roar of the explosion and the burning debris which rained down upon the Bashaw's palace punctuated one of the greatest accomplishments of the early American navy. British Vice-Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson would eventually describe this event as "the most bold and daring act of the age."¹³

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Charles Stewart to Edward Preble, U.S. Brig *Syren*, Syracuse Harbor, February 19, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:416.

¹³ Nelson quoted in Ray W. Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776-1816*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 135.

The explosion that night followed a small skirmish that broke out aboard the *Philadelphia*. A small vessel had sailed into the harbor, under the cover of darkness, and made its way alongside the *Philadelphia*. That vessel's crew consisted of seventy-five American sailors, led by Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, Jr.¹⁴ Decatur and his crew boarded the *Philadelphia* and after a short battle were able to take control of the ship; however, since "the Frigate was moored within half Gun shot of the Bashaw's Castle and of their principal Battery...the noise occasioned by boarding and contending for possession (altho' no fire arms were used) gave a general alarm on shore."¹⁵ While approximately twenty Tripolitans onboard the *Philadelphia* were killed in the battle and many others either jumped overboard or were able to board a small ship and sail ashore, the Americans "had not a man killed in this affair, and but one slightly wounded."¹⁶

The *Philadelphia*, a relatively large, well built vessel, would have made an impressive addition to the fleet of any of the Barbary states. As a result, Preble believed the *Philadelphia*'s destruction was of "National importance." Since he was uncertain about the success of a rescue mission, he ordered Decatur to simply destroy the *Philadelphia* if he did not believe he was capable of successfully sailing it out of Tripoli's harbor.¹⁷ In order to ensure the *Philadelphia*'s destruction, after securing the ship, Decatur ordered a fuse leading to the *Philadelphia*'s powder magazine be ignited. Minutes later, as Decatur and his crew made their escape from the Tripolitan harbor, the night sky was

¹⁴ Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, Ketch *Intrepid*, at Sea, February 17, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:414.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Edward Preble to Charles Stewart, U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, Syracuse Harbor, January 31, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:376.

illuminated by the explosion, which destroyed one of the original cornerstones of the American Navy and shook the walls of the nearby palace. The *Philadelphia's* proximity to the Bashaw's palace when it was destroyed guaranteed that the Bashaw of Tripoli, the man who ordered his corsairs to attack American shipping, "Saw the whole business with his own Eyes."¹⁸

This action was made more significant by the fact that the corsairs' capture of the *Philadelphia* was not the first unfortunate incident to befall either William Bainbridge, or the United States' fleet as a whole, during Bainbridge's tenure in the Mediterranean. As such, Decatur's successful destruction of the *Philadelphia* was immensely important in that it elevated the United States to a position of power from which it could more easily negotiate for the cessation of Tripolitan piracy. Furthermore, Decatur and his crew had skillfully and effectively avenged their nation's manhood by denying the bashaw his prize.

Prior to Tripoli's declaration of war in 1801, Bainbridge was in command of the *George Washington* with orders to deliver tributary payments to Algiers. Upon arrival, however, the dey of Algiers forced Bainbridge to deliver an Algerine tribute to the sultan of the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople. Thus, the *George Washington*, one of America's first warships to enter the Mediterranean, was transformed into nothing more than a cargo vessel and then forced to sail under Algerine colors. As a result of America's almost nonexistent naval presence in the Mediterranean, Bainbridge had no way to resist the dey's demands and was forced to endure the humiliation and emasculation that came

¹⁸ Nicholas C. Nissen, Danish Consul, Tripoli to Danish Consul, Marseilles, France, February 29, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:421.

with surrendering his vessel to the whims of his enemy.¹⁹ For the young republic, such a brazen violation of the sovereignty of Bainbridge's vessel served as a microcosm for larger transgressions which the Barbary pirates perpetrated against the United States. Not only had a vessel of an independent nation been commandeered, but it had been done so by the unelected head of a non-Christian society which sustained itself through piracy and scavenging, a society which met none of the previously defined conditions for civility.

Following events such as Bainbridge's humiliation aboard the *George Washington* and the surrender of the *Philadelphia*, America found itself in an extremely weak political position in the eyes of the Barbary states. America's main goal in going to war with Tripoli was to force the Bashaw to cease preying on American shipping, thus securing America's right to international free trade without being forced to pay an exuberant tribute. As a result of the weak political position America found itself in after this humbling incident, however, Americans were not taken seriously in their attempts to negotiate for agreeable terms. According to John Ridgely, who served aboard the *Intrepid*, the Bashaw and his court made no attempt to hide their jubilation upon the *Philadelphia*'s capture. "So extravagant were his calculations [following the capture of the *Philadelphia*], that he would not listen to any proposal of peace and ransom... This tone of confidence and triumph continued until the daring enterprise illuminated his castle with the blaze of his trophy."²⁰

¹⁹ William Bainbridge to Secretary of the Navy, Algiers, October 10, 1800 in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 1:378-9.

²⁰ John Ridgely to Susan Decatur, Annapolis, Maryland, November 10, 1826, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:425.

The destruction of the *Philadelphia* changed that. Decatur was able to successfully sail into the harbor and complete his mission, quite literally, under the Bashaw's nose. While the war with Tripoli continued after Decatur's success, such a humiliating defeat for the pirates was necessary to uphold American morale as well as "to bring the Bashaw of Tripoli to reason" by demonstrating to the corsairs that they faced an enemy in a position to strike much closer to their home than they could to theirs.²¹

After the *Philadelphia*'s destruction, Decatur returned to the fleet a hero. Without losing a single sailor, and suffering no damage to his ship beyond a single cannonball piercing a single sail, Decatur had managed to sneak into the well-protected harbor and destroy one of the most powerful new additions to Tripoli's fleet. On February 19, after receiving word of Decatur's accomplishments, Preble wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, making no attempts to hide his praise for Decatur:

Lieutenant Decatur is an Officer of too much Value to be neglected. The important service he has rendered in destroying an Enemy's frigate of 40 Guns, and the gallant manner in which he performed it, in a small vessel of only 60 Tons and 4 Guns, under the Enemy's Batteries, surrounded by their corsairs and armed Boats, the crews of which, stood appalled at his intrepidity and daring, would in any Navy in Europe insure him instantaneous promotion to the rank of post Captain. I wish as a stimulus, it could be done in this instance; it would eventually be of real service to our Navy. I beg most earnestly to recommend him to the President, that he may be rewarded according to his merit.²²

Since Preble truly believed that Decatur's actions were "beyond all praise" and executed in "the most gallant and Officer like manner," the commodore immediately began

²¹ Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, U.S. Ship *Constitution*, Syracuse harbor, February 19, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:442.

²² Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy to, U.S. Ship *Constitution*, Syracuse harbor, February 19, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:441. Decatur's direct promotion from Lieutenant to Captain resulted in him passing over the rank of Commander.

treating and addressing Decatur as though his promotion was already official.²³ When Preble returned Decatur to command of the *Enterprise*, Decatur became the youngest captain in the history of the United States Navy. While it took Congress several months to approve this decision, it took much less time for word of his mission and its subsequent success to spread across the nation.

Slightly over three months after Decatur's successful return to the fleet, dozens of newspapers throughout the United States published the first letter which Stephen Decatur wrote to Commodore Preble following the *Philadelphia*'s destruction. In this letter, Decatur detailed the precise events that took place while he was in the Tripolitan harbor, including the steps he took to burn the *Philadelphia*, the attempts by the Tripolitan forces to retaliate and prevent the vessel's destruction, as well as the details of his escape.

Decatur's bold actions and defense of American values did not end with the destruction of the *Philadelphia*. Now holding the rank of captain, Decatur played a major role in the most notable American assault on Tripoli, often referred to as the Battle of the Gunboats, which took place on August 3, 1804. According to Preble, "The Action commenced at ½ past 2. P. M. and lasted until ½ past 4, during which time a most tremendous fire was kept up by our Squadron, and the Enemies Batteries."²⁴ Preble wrote that over the course of this relatively short battle,

Six of our Gun Boats, led by the Gallant Captain [Stephen] Decatur, advanced into the Harbor to engage 19 Gun Boats, a Brig, two Schooners and a Galley of the Enemies, [the Tripolitans] were completely beaten, and

²³ Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy to, U.S. Ship *Constitution*, Syracuse harbor, February 19, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:413.

²⁴ Edward Preble to George Davis, *Constitution* at anchor off Tripoli, August, 7, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 4:340.

three of their best Gun Boats, were taken and brought out, one was Sunk, and all of them suffered very considerably – Decatur within musket shot of their Batteries, boarded and brought out two of the Enemies Gun Boats, each of superior force.²⁵

Despite Decatur's success against his enemy, however, his younger brother James, also in command of one of the American gunboats, was the only American life lost in the entire operation. According to Preble's account,

Gun Boat No. 2, under the Command of Lieutenant James Decatur & Mr. Thomas Brown Midshipman Second in Command, engaged one of the Enemy's Gun Boats which after a short conflict haul'd down their Colours to him; the treacherous enemy in the act of Lieutenant Decatur's getting on board to take possession, discharged a Volley of Muskettry in which that brave and gallant officer was killed; the enemy then sheered off from a long side and by superior sailing escaped being Captured.²⁶

According to Alexander Slidell MacKenzie's narrative, compiled from accounts of Decatur's companions Francis Gurney Smith and J. K. Hamilton, when Stephen heard this news, his "noble indignation at such base treachery" served to "impel him to the immediate pursuit of the assassin."²⁷ The reference to Decatur's anger as "noble indignation" sets Decatur apart from the "treacherous" pirates, highlighting his republican civility. MacKenzie goes on to say,

Still heedless of every prudential suggestion, he laid the head of his boat towards that of his brother's murderer, and, following him within the enemy's line, where he had taken refuge, ran on board, and leaped upon his deck, followed by the gallant young Macdonough, and the nine remaining Americans of his crew. This was a desperate undertaking,

²⁵ Edward Preble to George Davis, *Constitution* at anchor off Tripoli, August, 7, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 4:340.

²⁶ Richard Somers to Edward Preble, *Nautilus* at anchor off Tripoli, August 4, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 4:344-5.

²⁷ Alexander Slidell MacKenzie, "Life of Stephen Decatur," in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 4:347.

suggested by a courage which stopped to consider no inequality. For twenty minutes, the result of the contest seemed uncertain.²⁸

Over the course of this skirmish Decatur found the man who was, by most accounts, responsible for his brother's death. He was a Turkish captain much larger than Decatur. While engaged in combat with the captain, Decatur suffered a wound to his chest from a pike and was left even more vulnerable to other attackers, one of which attempted to strike a fatal blow with his sword while Decatur was wounded and distracted. Daniel Frazer, one of the previously wounded members of Decatur's crew, in "an act of heroic self-sacrifice which has never been surpassed," placed himself between the pirate's blade and Decatur's exposed back.²⁹

Then, in the words of Mackenzie, "the Tripolitan, exerting to the uttermost his superior strength, succeeded in turning Decatur, and getting upon him, held him to the deck...but the cool courage and fertile resources of Decatur came to his rescue in this extremity."³⁰ Decatur was able to reach a small pistol, which he kept in his pocket, and shoot the pirate captain before the corsair was able to kill him. The death of their captain resulted in a quick end to the Tripolitan crew's resistance, and Decatur was able to take the ship, with only Frazer and himself suffering substantial injuries.

As a result of the successful American attack, and most notably the accomplishments of the contingent of gunboats led by Stephen Decatur, "The Town of

²⁸ Ibid..

²⁹ Ibid. Some accounts claim that it was a Reuben James who took the blow for Decatur; however Daniel Frazer's name is present in the list of wounded from this battle, and James' is not..

³⁰ Ibid., 4:347-8.

Tripoli, as well as the Shipping in the Harbor has suffered very considerably.”³¹ The American success helped to further solidify the Americans’ opinion of their own superiority and the superiority of their republican beliefs. By succeeding over the Tripolitan forces American sailors were able to demonstrate their masculinity and assert some level of power over a group they saw as inferior and barbaric pirates, much like they would as patriarchs at home over slaves or Native Americans.

Decatur’s heroism and loyalty to his brother and country served to further bolster his reputation and standing as a republican man, just as it further demonstrated his masculinity. He played an essential role in doing what the majority of European nations had been unable to accomplish since the sixteenth century, and in doing so helped to strengthen the belief in the superiority of American republicanism. On a basic level, victory meant that Americans no longer had to pay tribute to Tripoli, but it can also be seen as an assertion of the nation’s masculine authority.

Decatur went on to serve, and distinguish himself, in both the War of 1812 and the Second Barbary War against Algiers in 1815, eventually reaching the rank of commodore. His courageous actions over the course of his naval career made him both a military hero and an exemplar for American citizenry; however, Decatur attracted attention for his personality both before and after his exploits against the Barbary corsairs. Throughout his life, Stephen Decatur was known for his stubborn determination to seek out glory and honor and his unquestionable heroism in the name of the United States and the republican values and ideology for which it stood, but also for his

³¹ Edward Preble to George Davis, *Constitution* at anchor off Tripoli, August, 7, 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers* 4:340

outspoken patriotism. These were all aspects which placed Decatur squarely within the definition of a republican man. In 1816, at a dinner in his honor, Decatur made one of the most famous toasts in naval history: “Our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong.” Such bravery in the name of, and loyalty to, the United States helped propel Decatur to the forefront of the young navy, but no other event made as much of an impression on his career as his destruction of the *Philadelphia* on February 16, 1804.

Bravery and patriotism were not the only traits held in high regard by republicans at the time. Both self-sufficiency and civility were also vitally important to the character of a republican man, and Decatur demonstrated these throughout his life as well. Early in life, Decatur, much like many young boys, was not entirely interested in his own education. Indeed, he was “more interested in swimming and sailing than in study.”³² This disinterest, however, would not last. Upon his return from Tripoli, Stephen Decatur met the “vivacious” Susan Wheeler, the daughter of Luke Wheeler, the mayor of Norfolk, Virginia.³³ The two were instantly attracted to each other despite the fact that “Susan was not exactly a blushing innocent. Well educated, charming, musically talented,³⁴ and indulgently spoiled by her rich father, she had long been socially active.”³⁵ Decatur, on the other hand, had not. Not only was the twenty-six year old three years younger than Susan, but he had also spent a large portion of his life at sea. Decatur, however, was in

³² Robert J. Allison, *Stephen Decatur: American Naval Hero, 1779-1820* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 11.

³³ James Tertius de Kay, *A Rage for Glory: The Life of Commodore Stephen Decatur, USN* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 73.

³⁴ Both vocally and on the harp.

³⁵ de Kay, *A Rage for Glory*, 73.

love and was looking for any way to feel worthy of Susan's adoration. He decided that the best way to feel socially equal to Susan was to "acquire as polished an education as Susan was so obviously blessed with."³⁶ For assistance, Decatur turned to family friend Dr. Benjamin Rush, the same Benjamin Rush who signed the Declaration of Independence. According to a letter written by Dr. Rush's son Richard³⁷ to Susan Decatur in 1846, Decatur said,

Doctor, I am going to speak to you as a friend. By good fortune I have risen fast in my profession, but my rank is ahead of my acquirements. I went young into the navy; my education was cut short, and I neglected the opportunities for improvement I had when a boy. For professional knowledge I hope to get along, expecting to increase it as I grow older; but for other kinds of knowledge, I feel my deficiencies, and want your friendly aid towards getting the better of them. Will you favor me with a list of such books, historical, and others of a standard nature, as you think will best answer my purpose, that I may devote myself at all intervals to the perusal of them?³⁸

Dr. Rush, moved by Decatur's humility, offered his assistance and quickly sent Decatur a list of books. While Decatur had to ask for assistance in compiling a list of books to study, his eagerness to improve himself through study and hard work harkens back to Jefferson's views of independent small farmers as being the pinnacle of republicanism. Furthermore, his attempt to raise his standing in society to impress Susan illustrates commitment to civility on Decatur's part, another central aspect of republicanism.³⁹

³⁶ Leonard F. Guttridge, *Our Country, Right or Wrong: The Life of Stephen Decatur, the U.S. Navy's Most Illustrious Commander* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2006), 85-6.

³⁷ Richard Rush was an old school friend of Stephen Decatur's.

³⁸ Richard Rush to Susan Decatur, May 22, 1846, quoted in Allison, *Stephen Decatur*, 78.

³⁹ Decatur married Susan Wheeler in March of 1806.

Decatur's rise within American society, stemming from his military fame, skill, and his commitment to bettering himself, demonstrates the important place such values had within American society at the time. On March 22, 1820, however, his meteoric rise was halted when Decatur succumbed to wounds sustained in a duel with James Barron, which had taken place earlier that morning.⁴⁰ According to the March 24, 1820, issue of the *Georgetown National Messenger*, when word quickly spread throughout Decatur's Lafayette Square neighborhood that the commodore lay on his death bed he was mourned not only as a "hero and a patriot" but as a "citizen and neighbor" as well. Decatur, through his openness and hospitality, was more than a war hero, more than a naval commissioner, he was also a beloved friend and a true republican man.

Decatur's death brought not only the social scene of Washington, D.C., to a standstill, but the government as well as a result of this "national affliction."⁴¹ Robert Allison quotes the March 29 *Essex Register*, "In the House of Representatives, the Speaker could hardly keep the members in order, 'so anxious do they seem to ascertain the particulars,' and so generally was 'Commodore Decatur beloved by the members.'"⁴² Furthermore, on March 25, 1820, just three days after Decatur's death, the Navy Department issued a general order, published on April 10 in, among others, the *Otsego Herald*, requiring naval officers to "wear crape upon the left arm for the period of thirty days, as a testimony of respect for the late commodore Stephen Decatur, deceased."

⁴⁰ "The Late Com. Decatur," *The City of Washington Gazette*, April 9, 1820.

⁴¹ Allison, *Stephen Decatur*, 3.

⁴² Ibid.

Both members of the government and the American public were desperate for more information about Decatur's career and death. The *City of Washington Gazette* was but one newspaper to publish brief biographies detailing Decatur's exploits. Later, approximately one month after Decatur's death, several newspapers across the country, in an effort to help the public better understand the loss of one of their heroes, published the correspondence between James Barron and Stephen Decatur, which led up to their infamous duel. This outpouring of grief and the overwhelming demands to know more about the circumstances surrounding Decatur's death offer one final illustration of Decatur's importance within American society at the time of his death.

Decatur's military successes off the Tripolitan coast, while an expression of Decatur's own masculinity also allowed the United States as a whole to assert its authority and superiority over the barbaric pirates. By contributing to America's victory, Decatur helped open additional markets in which American commerce could flourish, a vital factor in the survival of the young republic. Not only did Decatur support the nation, but he also represented many of the values which the American people held dear. His commitment to self-sufficiency and his unequivocal patriotism won him great renown amongst his republican peers, as the outpouring of public grief following his untimely death demonstrates. Without Stephen Decatur's bravery and skill throughout both the Tripolitan War and the Algerine War, a decade later, America would have been in a much less favorable position from which to negotiate with the Barbary powers. Decatur, however, was able to demonstrate America's superior skill and the American people were

more than happy to see his actions as a demonstration of their “superior” republican ideology.

Conclusion

America's involvement with the Barbary states from the mid-1780s until the conclusion of the Tripolitan War in 1805 showcased various aspects of the evolving republican ideology at the time. Over time, this idea evolved from classical republicanism, characterized by a fear of tyranny and practiced by the Federalists, into a more liberal strain. Liberal republicanism called for the dissemination of democratic privileges to a wider array of white, American men, relied on the self-sacrifice of individuals for the benefit of the society as a whole, and would go on to form the backbone of the Democrats' ideology during the 1820s and 30s. The Jeffersonian period and the First Barbary War represent a liminal stage between these two ideas of republicanism, one in which Americans were wary of tyranny but equally as fearful of mob rule. Furthermore, this period demonstrates the presence of both ideas of republicanism. Classical republicanism was illustrated by the fear of imprisonment and enslavement of white, republican Americans and liberal republicanism with the idea of a Jeffersonian "nobility of talent" was reflected in the skill and patriotic actions of men such as Preble, Decatur, and Bainbridge.

The most significant contribution of the First Barbary War to America's early development as an independent nation was that it demonstrated America's ability to unite in the defense of its values. As such Stephen Decatur's mission to destroy the captured American frigate *Philadelphia*, while she was being repaired and refitted in the harbor of the North African state of Tripoli, was perhaps the most important, and memorable, naval

action of the First Barbary War. This action not only inspired the rest of the American fleet and populace and demonstrated to America's enemies that the young nation was both willing and able to protect its interests abroad, but it also placed America in a position from which the young nation could defend its ideological beliefs.¹

A decade before the British defeat at New Orleans, Decatur's bravery, and that of the rest of the American navy, demonstrated to the powers of the Old World that the young, republican nation was more than capable of defending itself and its values against a battle-hardened foe. Charles Stewart, the man who commanded the *Syren* at Tripoli during Decatur's mission to destroy the *Philadelphia*, understood, perhaps better than anyone, the full scope of the impact of Decatur's actions. Stewart believed the *Philadelphia*'s destruction "shed a lustre throughout Europe, over the American character, and excited an unparalleled emulation in the squadron, in our country alone is where it has never been duly estimated or properly understood."² The European perception of Decatur's victory helped the young nation overcome the European belief in America's "national cowardice at sea."³ This, in turn, speaks to the real significance of the First Barbary War—that America was able to demonstrate to the rest of the world the strength and fortitude which they felt accompanied true civilization, republican values, and America's revolutionary spirit.

¹ Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, U.S. Ship *Constitution*, Syracuse harbor, February 19, 1804, *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, ed. Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S. Navy (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 3:442.

² Charles Stewart to Susan Decatur, Bordentown, New Jersey, December 12, 1826, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 3:426.

³ Fletcher Pratt, *Preble's Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power* (Cranbury: The Scholar's Bookshelf, 2007), 10.

The legacy of America's war against Tripoli, while all but forgotten, remains influential, if unacknowledged, by modern American culture. The importance of the Tripolitan War is most recognizable in the opening lines of the Marine Corps Hymn;⁴ however, this is not the only song written to honor the Navy's exploits in North Africa. The complex legacy of the First Barbary War is most eloquently encapsulated by the following song. While this song was written in 1805 to honor the heroes of the Tripolitan War, it also sums up the political and ideological motivations for war, as well as hinting at how the war has been remembered, or perhaps more accurately, why it has been forgotten.

When the warrior returns from the battle afar
 To the home and the country he has nobly defended,
 Oh! warm be the welcome to gladden his ear,
 And loud be the joys that his perils are ended!
 In the full tide of song, let his fame roll along.
 To the feast flowing board let us gratefully throng.
 Where mixt with the olive the laurel shall wave,
 And form a bright wreath for the brow of the brave.

Columbians! A band of thy brothers behold!
 Who claimes their reward in thy heart's war emotion:
 When thy cause, when thy honour urg'd onward the bold,
 In vain frown'd the desert—in vain roared the ocean,
 To a far distant shore—to the battle's wild roar,
 They rush'd thy fair fame, and thy right to secure.
 Then mixt with the olive the laurel shall wave,
 And form a bright wreath for the brow of the brave.

In conflict resistless each toil they endur'd,
 Till their foes shrunk dismay'd from the war's desolation:
 And pale beam'd the Crescent, its splendor obscur'd
 By the light of the star-spangled flag of our nation,
 Where each flaming star gleam'd a meteor of war,
 And the turban'd head bowed to the terrible glare.

⁴ "From the halls of Montezuma/To the shores of Tripoli"

Then mixt with the olive the laurel shall wave,
And form a bright wreath for the brow of the brave.

Our fathers who stand on the summit of fame,
Shall exultinly hear, of their sons, the proud story,
How their young bosoms glow'd with the patriot flame,
How they fought, how they fell, in the midst of their glory,
 How triumphant they rode, oe'r the wandering flood,
 And stain'd the blue waters with infidel blood;
How mixt with the olive, the laurel did wave,
And form a bright wreath for the brow of the brave.⁵

Written by Francis Scott Key, this song utilizes similar terminology and imagery, as well as the same tune and rhyme scheme, of a much more famous song which he would write nine years later.⁶

In addition to serving as a foundation and early version of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” this song’s existence demonstrates how contemporary Americans viewed the First Barbary War. Key focuses especially on the masculine assertion of America’s military might. Furthermore, it hints at many of the causes and ideological beliefs which propelled America to war, specifically in the third and forth verses which harken back to the religious and cultural imagery that was so prevalent in both the writings of Cotton Mather as well as the American captivity narratives from Algiers. Despite the many economic and political motives on both sides which drove America to war with Tripoli, it was, and still is, easy for Americans to view the conflict along cultural and religious lines. By looking at their Muslim enemies from a cultural standpoint, it became easier for Americans to see them as a distinct and inferior “other.” Furthermore, by referring to

⁵ *Boston Independent Chronicle*, December 30, 1805.

⁶ Victor Weybright, *Spangled Banner: The Story of Francis Scott Key* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1935), 147.

them as infidels and referencing cultural differences such as their “turban’d head,” Key furthered the belief in the superiority of American civility and republicanism, especially over a group of barbarians with alien and uncivilized customs.

In his second verse, Key identifies America’s reason for going to war: “thy right to secure.” While Key is unspecific within the verse, his audience would have been well aware that this war was being fought to secure America’s right to sail and trade freely without the fear of enslavement in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. It was in the defense of the right to freedom, both of commerce and from enslavement, for which Jefferson argued for war in the late 1780s and which men like Preble, Decatur, and Bainbridge proudly fought. The reasons for war represented the transition from classical republicanism to the more egalitarian liberal republicanism. The American Navy was fighting for the captives’ freedom, while the war effort was supported by a popular, republican movement at home. Furthermore, Decatur’s ability to rise to such prominence through his military skill and hard-work demonstrated the reality of the meritocracy which Jefferson believed was essential for a republic. Unfortunately for Jefferson and his supporters, at this time the United States sat upon the cusp of a new revolution, one that would come to a head under Andrew Jackson and see the further democratization of American society and the idea that anyone could hold a position of prominence.

While Stephen Decatur and the Barbary Wars have faded from the minds of most modern Americans, the legacy of those events still permeates America’s cultural atmosphere. When the American Navy sailed to “the shores of Tripoli” it was not to fight for the physical or political freedom of an entire nation. The Tripolitan War, however, was

essential to the survival and prosperity of the young republic and its values. Long before America's rise to world power status with the ability to defend and export democracy, a small group of republican sailors fought an enemy which had tormented Europe for centuries. In doing so, Decatur and his peers succeeded in defending an ideology and system of values which may have otherwise faded away in their infancy.

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